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WAITING

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BY

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AUTHOR OF "FATHER RALPH"



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WAITING

CHAPTER I

"HAVE you done papering the room, Mary?"

"I have then, and the paint has dried out nicely on the chairs. There's not the least fear of them sticking to any one in the morning. The eggs are gathered and the priest's cake is in the cupboard. Maurice is bringing home a couple of pound of beef-steak from the butcher within at Liscannow. I never rose to the like before at a station breakfast, but a neighbour told me Father James has a great liking for it as a relish with his tea."

"The Lord send it might put him in good humour," Mike Blake said, puffing a short, black, clay pipe thoughtfully.

"Amen, amen to that," his wife said, lifting the lid, laden with smouldering sods of turf, off a bastable on the open hearth. "It's doing grand," she added, peeping under the lid, "as brown as a berry, and no signs of burning on it."

"It's little people'll care for soda cake when they'll have lashings of white bread and their share of the priest's currant cake as well."

"Don't you be always looking at the black side of things, Mike Blake. When I was borrowing the cups and saucers off Mrs. Maloney beyond at

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Lissfad, she said the young curate had a liking for soda cake. He was reared in a town, and no doubt got his fill of white bread in his time, and he was never seen to touch the priest's cake. His own servant girl told Mrs. Maloney that, through dint of fasting for the late masses, his stomach is that weak that it rises against currant cake in the mornings."

Mike watched the turf blaze on the hearth for a few minutes.

"That's queer now," he said, his eyes fixed abstractedly on the pipe which he held out at arm's length. "I'm always able to eat what God sends."

Mrs. Blake took the cake out of the oven, laid it end up against a ledge of the dresser, sniffing the odour appreciatively.

"I know by the smell of it that it's as light as a feather," she said, with a sigh of satisfaction. "Everything is ready now for the morning, thanks be to God."

"Sit down on the creepy there and take your ease now, poor woman. It's on your feet you were all day," Mike said, making elaborate preparations for re-filling his pipe.

"I can't abide an untidy hearth. Wait till I put the broom to it," she said, taking a broom from beside the back door and brushing outlying embers and ashes on to the fire.

She sat on a three-legged stool opposite her husband, shaded her eyes from the blaze and watched him scrape out his pipe with a broken blade of an old pen-knife. He emptied the scrapings on to the hob beside him, carefully replacing them in the pipe when he had re-filled it with fresh tobacco. Her gaze wandered to his face as he lifted a live sod

of turf with the tongs, blew it to a flame, and proceeded to light his pipe. As the flame glowed on his face a short stubble showed on his clear, ruddy skin.

"'Twould never do not to be shaved in front of the priests," she said anxiously.

He rubbed his chin with his hand, put down the tongs and said dolefully—

"True for you, Mary. That's the worst of a station or a fair or the like, a man has to face the razor twice in the one week. I'll bring myself to it sometime between this and the bed."

He puffed his pipe slowly, his eyes following the shifting figures in the fire. Now and again a troubled look flitted across his hard grey eyes, his lips tightened on the pipe stem, giving prominence to his strong chin, and the lines on his forehead deepened.

His wife followed the changes in his face with some anxiety. Once she opened her lips as if to speak, but shut them again. He broke the silence after a few minutes.

"I wish I hadn't to face the big man," he said, puckering his forehead till his shaggy brows almost covered his eyes.

"Sure, he can't eat you, Mike," she said encouragingly. "And if Father James is hard to deal with itself, we might make it worth his while to be pleasant and accommodating."

She glanced round the kitchen complacently. The hammered-earth floor was swept clean. The light of the fire glinted on old lustre jugs hanging from the well-stocked dresser. Little curtains of cheap lace, looped back with pink ribbon, encased the one small window. The feeble rays of an

oil lamp on the window sill showed up the well-scoured deal table in front of the window, and lost themselves in the dim shapes of a few hams and flitches of bacon suspended from the newly whitened ceiling.

"Whist, woman," he said, looking round cautiously. "In a matter of the kind you mustn't let one hand know what the other hand is doing. We're fairly snug, thank God, but for all that we mustn't be too free with the few pence we have. There's Tom to think of, and Hanny will have to be fortunated. Besides, it cost us a power of money already to make Maurice a schoolmaster."

"It's little good that'll do him or us unless he can get a school," Mrs. Blake said moodily.

"True enough," Mike said, tapping his pipe on the heel of his shoe to loosen the tobacco ; "though Maurice himself told me that up and down the country everywhere there's plenty of priests giving schools to masters for a knowledge of book-learning alone, and without the compliment of a penny."

"What's the use of talking like that, Mike Blake? And the whole world knowing it was never Father James Mahon's way to give anything for nothing. Maybe it's how you want to break my heart," she added, raising her voice, "by sending my son roaming the nation in search of a cheap school, and you having dry money, enough and more to get him into Bourneen, lying idle in the Liscannow bank. And me wearing myself to the bone, too, for the last week, to ready the house for as fine a station as will ever be seen in the townland—or for that matter, in the whole parish—and all to pave the way for you to broach the matter decently to Father James."

She wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron.

"'Tis you always had the tears handy, Mary. Accusing me in the wrong, too! And I only surveying the ground on all sides, so as to argue the affair proper with Father James," he said with an aggrieved look.

"I might get the young curate to put in a good word with Father James," Mrs. Blake said in a calm, tearless voice, smoothing her apron carefully. "He's taken with Maurice greatly over the Irish."

"You might drop a tear or two at him," Mike said dryly. "If you got round the curate itself, sorra much good it'd do you with Father James. As long as I remember, the one thing he can't abide above everything else is a curate sticking his nose into the affairs of the parish."

"It's a pity we didn't make a priest of Maurice when we were about it. We wouldn't have to be going hat in hand for him now," Mrs. Blake said with a sigh.

"Hear the woman talk!" Mike said despairingly to the fire, spreading out his hands and shaking his head vigorously up and down. "It's hard set enough we were to spare the money to make a schoolmaster of him, let alone making a priest of him."

"There's no use crying over spilt milk anyway. Here, take the kettle off the crane, and scrape the beard off yourself while the house is quiet. There's nothing you'd ever do right only that I'm always at your elbow."

"You're a caution at the tongue, you are, Mary," Mike grunted.

He stood up, stretched himself, yawned, and set about his preparations for shaving in a leisurely

fashion. Taking the lamp off the window sill he put it on the corner of the table, whence it shed a faint light on a small handglass hanging on the wall. He laid a tin basin of hot water on the dresser, and, after much fumbling, found his razor in one of the lustre jugs.

"If you make a mess of the dresser, you'll get a taste of Hanny's tongue when she comes back from the Reardons," Mrs. Blake said, as he began to splash the water.

She mended a rent in the back of his sleeved waistcoat while he shaved with much spluttering and grunting. He had just put some cobweb on a cut on his chin, and was stropping his razor on the leg of his corduroy trousers, when the yard gate was shut with a bang.

"That's Maurice, or them other galivanters, Tom and Hanny—though it's early for them yet," Mrs. Blake said, pausing in her sewing and listening intently. "There's only one footstep—it must be Maurice."

"Not a word to him about our little dealing with Father James," Mike said hastily. "The less said about a thing like that the soonest mended."

She nodded. The latch of the front door was moved and the door pushed in. It was soon followed by the half door, and a young man of about twenty-four came in excitedly.

"It's true about the Bourneen school," he said. "I got a lift home from Father Ned Malone, and he told me for certain that the old master resigned to-day."

His blue eyes gleamed and lit up his whole face, giving a boyish softness to his strong jaw and firm lips. He held up a discoloured newspaper parcel,

smiled with the corners of his lips, and threw the parcel on the table.

"I don't think I'll ever be able to eat meat again after bringing that all the way from Liscannow," he said, wiping his hands on the roller towel at the back of the door.

"I was afeard you might forget it, and we must lose no chance of getting the right side of Father James now," Mrs. Blake said, her eyes fixed on him in admiration. "It's no surprise to me," she went on, again plying her needle rapidly, "that Master Driscoll is giving up. He gave me a hint of it early in the summer, and you still up in Dublin at the Training College. 'I'm growing old, Mrs. Blake,' he said, 'and by Christmas I'll lay the cane aside. With the help of God, and approaching Father Mahon in the right way, Maurice'll step into my shoes,' he said."

Maurice took a seat in the chimney corner and gazed at the fire.

"When I think of asking the big man I get nervous," he said. "He's very distant with me when he passes me on the road ever since I came home. Though he knows I'm fully trained and all."

"Priests do have a lot on their minds," his mother said eagerly. "I wouldn't mind his black looks at all. Sure, you wouldn't, Mike?"

"Sorra bit," Mike said, emptying the basin of water with an emphatic dash through the back door. "It comes natural to a man that has the ruling of several hundred families in a big parish like this to carry himself stiff."

"It's not my idea of a priest," Maurice said, with a slight frown; "Father Ned, now, is different——"

"Oh, he's only a new beginner. When he fills

out and gets a parish of his own, you'll see he'll be important enough," Mrs. Blake said, holding up the waistcoat to the light.

"He's not that sort," Maurice said, laughing.

"Will ye not leave the priests alone? They belong to God and let Him look after them," Mike said, drawing a wooden chair across the floor to the front of the fire. "Besides, you'd never know when you'd want them to do you a good turn."

"He can't do worse than refuse me."

"Refuse a master with all the prize books and certificates you have! Did you ever hear the like, Mike?" Mrs. Blake said, throwing the waistcoat into Mike's lap. "There's your waistcoat for you, and don't be tearing it again in a hurry. Not but that it might be better, maybe, if Mike had a word with the priest first," she added, with a shrewd look at her husband.

Maurice looked dubiously at his father, who said, as he wriggled into his waistcoat, "It's hardly worth while putting it on and it so near bed-time——"

"Did you hear me, Mike?" Mrs. Blake said sharply.

"My face is as prickly as a furze field—the way I grubbed at it with the razor," Mike said irrelevantly. When he had buttoned his waistcoat he glanced hesitatingly at his wife. Her stern look seemed to give him courage. He struck his knee sharply with his hand. "I'll do it," he said. "I'll face him like a man."

"I think I'd rather send in my application and stand on my own merits. After all, I'm well qualified," Maurice said shyly.

"Listen to the dying-away voice of him when

he's talking of himself!" Mrs. Blake said disdainfully. "If Father James let a bellow at you he'd make you tongue-tied entirely. Be said by your mother, and there's a good boy. Mike can make the most of your good points. He's not much at the talk except when he's worked up, but then the language rises in him like water in a pump."

Maurice smiled, frowned and muttered something about not liking it. Mike shuffled his feet uneasily and was about to speak when his wife shut him up.

"Take a look up the road and see if them stragglers are coming home," she said. "Hanny and myself'll have our work cut out for us in the morning, and we ought to be in bed by now."

Mike got up with a sigh of relief. "I'll have a look round too, and see that the cattle are safe for the night," he said, moving towards the door.

Mother and son sat on by the fire. He played with the smouldering sods with the tongs. She watched him hungrily, her hands laid flat on her lap.

"It's a great chance to have you near me for ever and always," she said, with a break in her voice.

He looked up with a start, but her face was as he had always seen it, lined and hard.

"I'll be able to work now. There's so much for a man to do." The glow in his eyes died away. "That is if I get Bourneen," he added doubtfully.

"I had it in my mind you to be there, ever since the day Master Driscoll said he was going to make a monitor of you," she said gently.

"I've been a great burthen on ye all, spending and not making anything."

"Mike itself, and he's sometimes close with the

money, never grudged the few pounds we spent on you."

"I didn't mean it in that way, mother," he said impulsively, laying his hand on hers.

She looked at his hand curiously for a moment. "I don't know what's come over me," she said, rising hastily. "It's the press of work for the station, I doubt, that has taken the wits out of me."

She moved and replaced several articles on the dresser. "That's your father's notion of cleaning up after himself. He and his shaving! It's like a litter of pigs about the floor. It's marrying you'll be thinking of now when you get a school of your own?" she added without turning round.

Maurice laughed heartily. "It's a queer mood you're in, mother. I've something else to do besides marrying. Moreover, there isn't a girl between here and Dublin that'd take a second look at me."

"Isn't there then?" she said, bridling and facing him, her arms akimbo. Her eyes rested on his face, from which his eyes gleamed humorously through half-closed lids; passed with a growing look of satisfaction over his well-knit figure, the lines of which not even his ill-fitting black coat and baggy tweed trousers could conceal. "And plenty, maybe, the hussies! if you gave 'em any encouragement. Keep off them, Maurice, agra, it's only supping sorrow you'd be with the half of 'em. Not that people heed that very much when the fit is on 'em," she added half to herself.

The sound of laughter came through the open door. Mrs. Blake frowned. She listened a moment and smiled wearily.

"That's Minnie Reardon's laugh," she said,

pursing her lips. "She sees Tom and Hanny down the road, and now he'll see her back home. Well, well, sooner or later it comes to every one, and he could do worse. Larry Reardon can give her a good pot of money, and we could fortune Hanny out of it decently, and have some over. What kept you so late, Hanny?" she said to a shawled girl who stood hesitating in the doorway.

"The Irish class was late to-night," Hanny said apologetically. "But look at what I've brought, mother."

"Irish or Rooshan, it's the same the world over——" Mrs. Blake was beginning, when she caught sight of a teapot in the parcel which Hanny was undoing. "Not Mrs. Reardon's best Britannia metal teapot!" she said in surprise.

"The very one," Hanny said, displaying it proudly. "Mrs. Reardon forced it on me, for to be the priest's teapot at the station to-morrow. It'll look grand at the head of the table."

"Six and twenty years I've seen it in her cupboard, or on her room table on station days, but she never proffered it to me before," Mrs. Blake said musingly, holding the teapot between her and the light.

"It's a grand teapot," Maurice said quizzingly.

"It is," Mrs. Blake said, snapping her lips. "It shows how the wind blows up at the Reardons, anyway. But sure, it's glad and thanking God I ought to be to have Tom well done for, and not to be flying in the face of Providence."

"Strawberry and Blacky were lashing at other in the stall, and I had to spancel——" Mike said, coming in.

His wife interrupted him crossly. "It's all

hours of the night. Will you begin the Rosary, Mike Blake, and not be gabbling there? I'll have to be up before the dawn to ready things for the priests."

Mike grumbled that there was "no depending on a woman's temper between one minute and the next," but he knelt obediently by the hob, and gave out the Five Glorious Mysteries, to which his family responded, kneeling beside a chair or table. Mrs. Blake looked towards the door as the latch rattled in the middle of the second mystery, and watched Tom, a loose-framed, yellow-haired giant, creep in on tiptoe and kneel by the dresser. "I might as well steel my heart to be parted from them all," she muttered, leaning her head on her arms. In a moment she added a fervent voice to the response, "Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners. . . ."

CHAPTER II

HANNY BLAKE's face was flushed and shining as she stood before the looking-glass in the kitchen and pushed a stray curl into place.

"What o'clock is it now?" Mrs. Blake called out anxiously from a room off the kitchen.

"It's seven by the clock, so it's half-past six at least," Hanny replied, after a few seconds calculation in front of the old, uncased, grandfather clock hanging from the wall beside the dresser. "Everything is near done, and there's oceans of time. No one is likely to be here before half-past seven."

"Did you see that your father had on his clean shirt?"

"I did."

"I'm just getting out of my old skirt, and I'll be ready to meet the world in a couple of minutes. Come in and see is there any button loose behind on me?"

Hanny stood for a while at the door, admiring the room for the hundredth time. It was all newly done up. Pink tissue paper filled the small grate. Blue cornflowers predominated in the many-coloured wall-paper. A brilliant patchwork quilt covered the four-poster bed in the corner. Bed-posts, wooden chairs, the mantelpiece, the window sill, the huge cupboard, and Mrs. Blake's wooden chest, at the foot of the bed, were all freshly painted in chocolate

red. The crochet antimacassar on the one hair-cloth armchair, the curtains on bed and window had come spotless from a recent washing. New fibre matting covered the earthen floor. Mrs. Blake's cast-off clothes, strewn around her on the matting, were alone out of place. Hanny picked them up and thrust them into the trunk. She then walked all round her mother and nodded approvingly.

"You look years younger in them clothes," she said, tightening a hairpin. "Though the apron is white itself, I'd be inclined to leave it off," she added, examining it critically.

"I'd be lost without it for want of something to do with my hands," Mrs. Blake said, looking round the room carefully. "Everything is right here as far as I can see. There's the chair with the cushion on it for Father James to hear on, and all the things for the room breakfast are on the table there in the corner. Don't forget to come in about the last gospel and pull it into the middle of the room, and lay it out right. Minnie Reardon might help you."

"She will. I asked her last night; she said she'd be glad to do anything."

"She did, did she? I suppose she thinks any one marrying Tom'll get the room. But sorra foot Mike and me'll budge out of it as long as there's breath in our bodies. If the finest lady in the land came into the house she must put up with the big room upstairs, and I'll be loth to disturb Maurice out of that too, for a stranger. Is there a chair in your room for Father Ned to hear on?"

"There is."

"And everything else?"

Hanny ticked off the items on her fingers.

"The cows are milked and driven out. The horses are in the cow stalls, and there's a feed of oats in the manger in the stable for the priests' horses."

"You saw to that with your own eyes?"

"I did."

"I wouldn't trust a man to do anything right on a morning like this. Any trifle of sense they have leaves them. I'm sure your father forgot to put a bundle of rushes in that puddle by the gate?"

"He did it near an hour ago. Besides, it's near dried out with the frost."

Mrs. Blake looked disappointed, but said cheerfully—

"It promises to be sunny, and it'll get wet again soon. Them white frosts don't last long."

They went into the kitchen, where Hanny continued to tick off her list.

"The kitchen breakfast things are on the dresser, all ready. The big kettle is full to the brim, and on the top crook, well out of the reach of the fire. The eggs are in the skillet, ready to be put on. The beefsteak is in the pan under the hob."

"Everything is going too smooth to last," Mrs. Blake said dolefully. "You forgot the clean bag for the priest's feet in front of the altar when he's saying mass," she added sharply.

"I didn't then. It's there rolled up so as not to be walked on by the throng of people. I'll spread it out after Matsey Boylan lays the altar," Hanny said, in a slightly ruffled tone.

"Don't lose heart, Hanny, agra," Mrs. Blake said, patting her daughter on the shoulder. "I'm not fault-finding. Only making sure that we'll get the full credit out of all our slaving—and a credit

to us it is, if we were up before cock-crow to-day itself."

She looked around the kitchen complacently, at the cheerful turf fire on the hearth, at the burnished, brass candlesticks on the ledge over the settle. She sighed happily as she took a Prayer-book off a shelf, sat on a creepie and said—

"I might be able to say a few prayers, and prepare for confession before the people come. You'd best rest your limbs too."

Hanny was too restless to sit down. She took another look in the glass, and refixed the brooch in the lace collar which she wore over her blouse. As she stood at the door the red sun turned to gold as it rose over a low hill in the distance. The bare elm tree at the end of the bawn seemed to hold the sun in the close embrace of one of its huge branches, curved like an arm. It reminded her somehow of Jim Reardon. She blushed, and fell to wondering if he'd admire all she had done to the house for the last week. Would she ever have a house of her own to paper, and whitewash and paint? Jim Reardon came into her thoughts again, but she said a "Hail Mary" to put him away—he was too distracting. With a deep sigh she went in to the kitchen, knelt by the settle and began her preparation for confession.

Mike Blake and his two sons lounged by the gate, clad in their best clothes.

"We were turned out of bed hours too early," Mike said resentfully.

"It was the most wonderful dawn I ever saw," Maurice said dreamily: "the grey pallor of a corpse flushing into this." He waved his hand towards the elm tree.

Mike yawned. "It's the promise or a fine day, sure enough, but I wish I wasn't shook out of the blankets so soon, and I wanting all my strength, too, to face Father James." He dragged at his tight collar. "If a man could only take a shough of a pipe itself, but I'm afeard of swallowing the smoke and breaking my fast, and it'd never do for the head of the house not to lead the way to communion at a station mass. Look down the road, Tom, and see if there's any signs of the priests' coming."

Tom stepped out briskly, fingering his tie, rubbing back his shock hair at the sides, and straightening his hat. He looked up the road first and sighed.

"There's no sign of them," he said dejectedly, when he returned.

"Nor of the Reardons either, I suppose?" Maurice said dryly, with a smile.

"No," Tom said shortly, blushing to the colour of his reddish-yellow hair.

"You're doing great work about the place, Tom," Maurice said.

Tom looked pleased, but said gruffly, "It's only a trifle."

"It's a tower of strength you are to the place——"

"I think I'll wait within," Tom said, interrupting his father.

"I'd as lief keep out of the reach of your mother's tongue when she's in a fuss," Mike said, his eyes following Tom's retreating figure. "He's a giant of a man and as biddable as a child—a throw back in size to some old ancestor, I suppose, for he's a head above his mother or myself. Not but he has

the obstinacy of a jackass when he's roused, which is seldom. It's the way with all them quiet-going people. He mightn't have the learning of you, Maurice, but he has a powerful grip of things——"

He was settling himself down to a long speech when a young priest drove up to the gate.

"You're heartily welcome, Father Ned," Mike said, standing, hat in hand, at the side of the trap, while Maurice stood at the horse's head.

The priest, a tall, fair man in glasses, a heavy frieze coat buttoned to his chin, jumped down and shook Mike's hand warmly.

"Don't let the grass grow under your feet about Bourneen school," he whispered to Maurice as he passed. "I tried to pump the P.P. last night, but he was a dry well."

Mrs. Blake, Hanny and Tom met him at the door.

"God bless the house," he said heartily.

"And you too, Father," they said in one voice.

Before he had taken off his overcoat half a dozen people arrived. He chatted pleasantly with them, holding his hands towards the blaze.

"Won't you sit down, Father, and take a real heat of the fire?" Mrs. Blake said, pushing a chair towards him.

He shook his head, took a purple stole from the pocket of his soutane and put it round his neck.

"I'm late as it is," he said, with a regretful glance at the fire. "I must try and hear the bulk of the people before Father James comes. If you show me where I'm to sit, I'll start at once."

She led the way to Hanny's small bedroom off the kitchen, to the back of "the room." He sat on a chair inside the half-opened door. Mrs.

Blake knelt on the clay floor and began her confession.

"The curate itself stands in fear of the big man," a woman in the kitchen whispered.

"Faith, and why wouldn't he? 'Tis Father James has an awesome eye," her neighbour replied.

A thin stream of people now began to arrive. The queue, opposite the room in which Father Malone was hearing confessions, extended in an irregular curve to the back door, and along the side-wall as far as the settle. Most of the women wore shawls over their heads; a few were in hats and bonnets, and a few in long, hooded cloaks of dark-blue pilot cloth. Even Hanny donned a shawl before taking her place in the queue. When they had confessed, the women knelt in corners or around the fireplace, and prayed with an occasional whisper to a neighbour. "'Tis Father Ned is easy with the penance." "He's a grand man entirely." "He never puts the blush on your face with an awkward question." The men, after kneeling for a few minutes, retired to the yard in front of the house, where they talked in small groups in hushed tones. Mrs. Blake flitted between "the room" and the kitchen fire, making final preparations. She counted the people in the kitchen and in the yard and whispered to Hanny—

"Do you miss any one?"

"They're all here except the Dilleens, and you can count on three of them."

"Stand you by the door and give me word when Father James appears, so that I can be outside to bid him welcome."

She placed the Britannia metal teapot, a large tin one, and two made of brown earthenware on the seat within the fireplace.

"Keep an eye on them, Mrs. Donlon," she said to a woman kneeling near, "and don't let any one knock over the canister."

"Here's Father James now, mother. He's just getting down at the gate," Hanny said in a loud, excited whisper.

There was a general movement throughout the kitchen. The muttering of prayer in the corners ceased. All stood up.

"Keep the passage to the room clear, and to the fire, too. He might like a heat of it before he begins to hear," Mrs. Blake said, rushing towards the door.

"Let me in before you, Bessy," a girl said eagerly to another in front of her in Father Malone's queue. "I must get heard before Father Ned stops. I never could face Father James. Sure you have nothing to tell."

"Little or more, I'm not going to tell it to Father James. The place I have I'll keep."

Mrs. Blake and Hanny stood on the doorstep. The men in the yard held their hats in their hands. Mike Blake stretched an arm over the wheel of Father Mahon's trap to save his greatcoat. Tom patted the horse's head, while Maurice fidgeted uneasily in the background.

Still sitting in the trap Father Mahon unwound a long, black, woollen muffler which swathed his neck and the lower part of his face.

"Hang that near the fire. It might be damp from the touch of frost on my breath," he said, handing the muffler to Mike.

"Sure I will, your reverence."

"Rub the mare down well, and cover her. Don't give her more than a lock of oats, only let it be good."

"I'll see to that, sir," Tom said stiffly.

A slight look of suspicion passed over the priest's steel grey eyes, but he laughed. It was an unsmiling laugh that came in a harsh cackle from the back of his throat, and had a varied effect on those who heard it. Tom twitched at the reins, and, with a sour look on his usually pleasant face, said, "Dang you," to the mare. Matsey Boylan, the clerk, who was fumbling with the station-box at the back of the trap, grasped the box nervously and slunk away towards the house. Mike attempted a sickly smile, but there was no responsive laugh from any one.

Father Mahon frowned on Tom; who said cheerfully, "I'm afraid I pulled her mouth, your reverence."

The frown persisted as he descended from the trap with dignity. It was more pleasant than his laugh and seemed to put Mike at his ease.

"You're looking grand, your reverence," he said admiringly.

"Thank you, thank you," the priest said, drawing himself up.

He was an imposing man of about six feet two, and held his square shoulders well back. He carried himself so well that one hardly noticed the curvature in the front of his overcoat where the middle buttons were somewhat strained. In occasional moments of repose his face looked handsome. His chin was strong, his nose well formed; the blue black of his skin, where he shaved, went well with his rather heavy, black eyebrows and thick, black hair flecked with grey. But he had a habit of protruding his under-lip and contracting his forehead and eyebrows that took away somewhat from his good looks.

He threw a keen look at Maurice, said "How are you?" but did not wait for a reply. He looked over the wall of the kitchen garden on his left and said, "Humph!" as his eyes rested on some flower beds.

"They're Hanny's," Mike said. "Tom gives her a hand at them an odd time."

Mrs. Blake was already curtseying at the door; but Father James, after waving his hand carelessly to a few men in the yard who greeted him, stood inspecting the house, his eyes passing through and over her without recognition.

"You're getting up in the world every year, Mike," he said.

"God is fairly good to us," Mike said cautiously. "I don't hold myself with whitewashing to that extent. And them window boxes are only throwing away money. It cost a power, too, to move the manure heap out of the bawn, and shut up the doors of the stable and cowhouse on this side, and make new doors into the new yard at the back."

"Humph!" Father James said, walking on.

Mrs. Blake curtseyed again, saying, "You're welcome, Father."

"Well, Mrs. Blake," he said, shaking hands with a preoccupied air, "how is all your care?"

"Finely, your reverence, and thank you kindly," she said, following at his heels. "There's a nip of frost in the air. Won't you take a heat of the fire?"

He made no reply to this. He nodded and waved his right hand in a blessing to those who bowed and curtseyed in the kitchen, as he walked into the room.

"For God sake let some one go in to him? He'll be vexed to be kept waiting," Mrs. Blake said anxiously.

"I suppose I'll have to go in," Mike said with a sigh, laying his hat on the floor.

"'Tis Mike has the bold spirit," a woman said admiringly.

"Sure if the man of the house wouldn't give the good example, who would?" another said.

"Himself isn't in the best of tempers to-day," Mrs. Blake said to Matsey Boylan, busy over the station-box, jerking her thumb towards the room door.

"If it's Mike you mean, I see no loss on him; if it's the priest you mean, he's as cross as two sticks," Matsey said, lifting the collapsible station-box on to the kitchen table, and giving his attention to the arrangement of the temporary altar.

"Put a splinter of wood, one of ye, under that front leg of the table to steady it," he said. "That'll do now. Let ye keep back," he added to several willing helpers, "and don't ye put a finger near any of the blessed things, the chalice or the altar stone or the like, or maybe ye'd find yourselves turned into a beast or something worse."

"Glory be to God," an old woman said, "and it's gospel truth, for I often heard it said in my young days."

Mrs. Blake was busy dragging people from the end of Father Ned Malone's queue and pushing them forcibly through "the room" door to confess to Father Mahon. She soon tired of this and spoke generally—

"Ye might as well go first as last. The more of ye that go to him the better chance there'll be

for the rest of ye to be heard by the young priest. For if ye leave long gaps Father James'll think ye're all done, and give orders to Father Ned to begin the mass. And where'll ye be then? Ye'll have to go to Father Mahon whether ye like it or no."

"There's something in what you say, Mrs. Blake, but I don't see how 'twould benefit me," a woman said doubtfully, making an effort to resist Mrs. Blake's pull on her arm. "I don't like to be disrespectful to the woman of the house, but you took good care, ma'am, to make your soul yourself with the young curate."

"Is the altar ready?" Father Mahon called out from the room.

"It is, your reverence. I'm just lighting the candles," Matsey said.

"Then ring the bell and tell Father Malone to begin mass. I'll hear the few that are over."

"Let me in first, Matsey, and I'll not forget it to you," whispered the man nearest Father Malone's door as Matsey approached.

"It'd be as much as my place is worth, if himself came to know of it," Matsey said, after a moment's hesitation; "and he has eyes in the back of his head."

There was a general sigh from the penitents as they crossed over reluctantly to Father Mahon's door.

While Father Malone was praying in front of the altar, Matsey rang a small bell at the kitchen door. The little groups in the yard broke up and the men entered the house. The large kitchen was soon packed, an overflow extending into Hanny's bedroom. Mrs. Blake lowered the kettle nearer

to the flame, drew the pot of eggs close to the fire and ladled tea into the teapots.

Before putting on his chasuble Father Malone sprinkled the little congregation with holy water. All stood up to receive it. For a moment there was a re-shifting of places. Hanny knelt near the room door. Mrs. Blake beckoned to Maurice and whispered —

“I’ll keep handy to the fire myself to lift on the things when the time comes. Keep convenient to the front door you. Though you shut the half-door itself, them hens have a way of jumping up on it when they’re least wanted. Hoosh them off the minute you catch sight of one, or they’ll be drowning the voice of the priest and Matsey.”

Maurice knelt in the corner between the dresser and the door. Not even the warm clasp of old Master Driscoll’s hand, nor his assurance, “he must give it to you—the whole parish would rise against him if he didn’t,” had driven away the feeling of depression evoked in him by Father Mahon’s manner. He had missed going to confession to Father Malone. He watched the people go in and out of the room in which Father Mahon was still hearing, and half got up off his knees. He dropped back again. It would be a mockery with the feelings he had towards the priest. He heard the priest’s voice raised in anger addressing some penitent, and felt still more bitter. Stories he had heard from his youth up of Father Mahon’s tyranny came into his mind ; and stories of other priests heard from students in the Training College. How could he take a school from him ? A longing to get away from Bourneen came over him. A hen fluttered on to the half-door. He hooshed it away

with a smile, and smiled again at a ridiculous mispronunciation of a Latin phrase in Matsey's stentorian voice. He looked towards the altar. Father Malone's eyes were fixed with an absorbed look on the missal from which he was reading the Sanctus. Was it the effect of his glasses, or some trick of the sunlight streaming through the window and lighting up the priest's face, that so transformed his commonplace features? An indescribable quality was in his voice too, as if he saw and felt and tried to put into words some vision that made him transcendently happy.

Matsey tinkled the bell at the end of the Sanctus and the spell was broken. Father Mahon blew his nose loudly in the room. Father Malone read the canon silently. The congregation coughed and shuffled. A voice said impatiently, "Don't be scrooging me, will you?" The bell tinkled again to announce the consecration. There was a drawing in of breath and a bending of heads. The priest's voice, hardly raised above his breath, filled the whole kitchen. The kettle sang on the hearth, the clock ticked loudly, a cock crowed in the yard. But these sounds only made the silence deeper. The sun danced, as if in joy, on the brass candlesticks over the settle, on the tin basin that hung by the back door, and glittered through the white hair of an old man bending forward over the stick with which he supported his shaking body. The priest's voice seemed to have gathered to itself all the pent-up emotion of the congregation as he spoke the words of consecration, and, for a moment, Maurice had the feeling of infinite peace and harmony that he felt, earlier in the morning, when the first saffron tints of the sky in the east flushed into pink.

At the last tinkle of the bell the whole congregation breathed a deep sigh in unison, and the coughing and shuffling began anew. As he held back from communion Maurice felt that he had missed much, and regretted that he had not gone to confession, even to Father Mahon of whom he now thought more gently.

At the last gospel Mrs. Blake elbowed her way towards Hanny.

"Why aren't you laying the table?" she said impatiently.

"He's walking about the room, and Minnie and myself were afraid to venture it."

"You haven't the spunk of a cat. Go up and wet the tea you, and I'll do it."

As Father Malone was taking off his vestments, Father Mahon stood in front of the altar, facing the people, and spoke what he called a few words in season. He gave a vivid picture of hell, of its many torments, especially of its heat, which was so great that if all the oceans, seas, rivers and lakes of the world were poured into hell they would dry up in a moment, quicker than a spit in a limekiln. He was in the middle of an illustration in which a little boy in torn breeches was sliding down a red-hot banister, when the frizzling and odour of beefsteak filled the room.

"Bedad, I can smell the gossoon burning," some one whispered.

There was a smothered laugh. Father Mahon frowned and paused.

"If he starts again the tea'll be as black as senna," came from near the fire.

There was a loud clatter of crockery from the room.

"It's impossible for a preacher to collect his thoughts in such a pandemonium. I'll take the dues now," Father Mahon said crossly, opening a black note-book which he had been fingering while he was preaching.

"Mike Blake," he called out.

Mike laid a half-sovereign and a half-crown on the table which, by Matsey Boylan's efforts while Father Mahon was preaching, had ceased to be an altar.

"For the mass; for the dues," Mike said, as he laid down each coin separately.

"It's an improvement; but not enough, not enough," the priest said, protruding his under lip. "A man of your substance too, and your land your own now."

"And what would you be cessing me at, your reverence?" Mike said, scratching his grizzled head.

"Make it the even pound," the priest said, wetting the point of his pencil.

"Bedad, that's new doctrine, your reverence, and I paying high at the Christmas and Easter collections."

"There's no compulsion," the priest said laughing, showing his regular, yellow teeth.

"What are you up to, Mike? bandying words with the priest, and in your own house too," Mrs. Blake said agitatedly, a teapot in her hand. "He's got into that habit of arguing with me, your reverence, over every trifle, 'tis no wonder he'd forget himself when he's talking to his betters. And the priest of the parish, too! For shame, Mike!"

Mike drew a dirty linen bag from an inside

pocket of his waistcoat, and reluctantly undid the string. He laid another half-sovereign on the table, and was taking back the half-crown when Mrs. Blake pulled away his hand.

"Is it take back money you would, once you laid it on the altar of God? You're no better than a heathen savage. He's only an ignorant man at the best, your reverence."

"God will bless the cheerful giver," Father James said sententiously. "You all know how it grieves me to speak about money. All I shall say is that I hope Mike Blake's generosity will prove a good example to others."

"I never heard him yet that there wasn't a silver tail to his sermon," Larry Reardon muttered to his wife, in the background. "'Twas a dirty trick Mike Blake played on the whole of us, giving such a lead as that so readily."

"I wouldn't be too hard on the poor people. It's easy seen they're making up to him because of Maurice," his wife whispered. "We'll have to rise a little I doubt, but I'd take no pattern from Mike Blake. On account of the purchase of the land, and the whole world knows we got it cheap, I wouldn't grudge him a couple of shillings. But as for gold! I'd see him in heaven first, the Lord forgive me. There's many a place the station dues is only a shilling, and he's bent on making 'em equal to Christmas and Easter. You haven't the character of a mouse, Larry, unless you put down your foot upon it," she added vehemently.

"Whist, woman. It's easier said than done; not but I'll put up a strong fight," Larry said, with doubtful firmness.

While Father James haggled with each contributor, Mike Blake stood by the front door with hospitable intent. Custom made the house free to all for mass, but breakfast was a matter of private hospitality. Custom also dictated that after payment of the dues all strangers should make an effort to leave. Mike intercepted them at the door.

"Sorra foot any one'll leave the house without breakfast. Don't be slipping away there, Mrs. Hinnissey," he said, embracing a fat woman who got wedged in the doorway in an attempt to get out.

"With all the throng you have, I thought I'd better be making myself scarce."

"There's lashings for all, and besides the wife'd never forgive you for leaving her in the lurch like that."

"Faith, I wouldn't be offending her for the whole world," Mrs. Hinnissey said, going back cheerfully.

"I am surprised at you trying to leave without breaking your fast, Teigue Donlon."

"Mightn't I be let have a draw of the pipe in the yard itself?"

Mike looked out. "You might then. Tom is at his post by the gate, so there's no danger of you slipping away. I'd like a few draws myself, but I must do my duty here," with a sigh.

Mrs. Blake kept up a constant march between the room and the kitchen fire. She chafed at the delay over the collection, complained that the eggs would be as hard as bullets: a hard case for her, she explained, as it was her pride on a station day to have the milk running out of the tops. The steak, too, was done to thraneens and would be

as tough as leather, a sore trial for Father Mahon's teeth to get through. It was all to the good, of course, to have the room table laid, but how was a woman to have any peace till the kitchen table was ready? and that couldn't be touched till the money was cleared off it. She put fresh coals under the teapots, ranged in a semicircle round the hearth, and ordered Minnie Reardon to keep on cutting bread and butter, nice and thick, while she had any strength left in her arm. She gave a sigh of relief when Father Mahon closed the station book with—

"It's not too bad, but it ought to be better, much better."

"Won't you take the head of the table in the room now, your reverence? Sure you must be starved to death," she said, curtsying.

He assented graciously, almost with a smile. "There's no use in leaving this money to Mike—he has too much as it is," he said jocosely, gathering up the coins and stuffing them into his trousers' pockets.

When the priest left the kitchen Hanny spread a cloth on the kitchen table, which was soon covered with dishes of bread and butter, currant cake, eggs, and a varied assortment of crockery. There was much disputing as to who should sit at the kitchen table or in the room with the priests. It needed much persuasion and some pushing on the part of Mrs. Blake to induce her guests to take the more honourable position. One said that the big man paralysed his tongue; another, that he could eat more free if the eyes of the clergy wasn't on him. Matsey Boylan said that by rights the clerk of the parish should sit with the clergy—it was the way in old ancient days; but in these days the clerk had come

down in the world, and only for the drop of wine that was always left when Father Malone said mass, he'd have no heart in him for his breakfast at all.

"Is it a fine young man like you, and all the girls running after you, Matsey?" Mrs. Hinnissey said.

"They are that. But what's the use, when my mother won't let me have one of them?" he said dismally. "I'll be fifty-three come Martinmas, but she says she'd take the stick to me if ever I thought of bringing one of 'em in on the floor to her." Tears filled his weak, rheumy eyes and his jaw dropped.

"And who is she now?" Mrs. Hinnissey said encouragingly.

Matsey's eyes brightened and he pushed a wisp of grey hair over his bald forehead.

"Well, last week it was Ellen Davey; but I was greatly taken by a likely girl of the Dwyers' at the station we were at yesterday. But, begob, if either Miss Hanny there or Miss Reardon would only say the word, I'd risk my mother and the stick," he said valiantly, though his wizened face blanched a little.

"It's a pity I'm not a widow woman," Mrs. Hinnissey said with a sigh. "If I could only get rid of Jack you might cast an eye on me, Matsey?"

Matsey looked at her critically.

"There's no denying you're fine and fat and comfortable looking——"

"I'm the best of fat pork," Mrs. Hinnissey shouted, laughing boisterously.

"Come away into the room out of that, Mrs. Hinnissey," Mrs. Blake interrupted, "and try and raise a laugh there. A funeral is nothing to it for solemn seriousness. And you, too, Mrs. Reardon,

there's a place next Father James for you. And who has a better right to sit forenint her own teapot?"

"There's no denying the woman of the house," Mrs. Hinnissey said, making a wry face, "even if it loses me my chances of Matsey itself."

"Make your mind easy, ma'am," Matsey said graciously, "I think I'll stick to the young ones—they're more suited to my sprightly youth. Maybe before I'm done eating I might make up my mind which of them I'll have—since I can't have 'em both," he added with a sigh.

With the coming of Mrs. Reardon and Mrs. Hinnissey the table in the room was full. Father Mahon sat at the head with Father Malone on his right and Mrs. Reardon on his left. The old schoolmaster sat beside Mrs. Reardon, and Mrs. Hinnissey next Father Malone. Mike Blake, Maurice, Larry Reardon, Teigue Donlon and Jack Hinnissey completed the select party.

"Why don't you take a seat yourself, Mrs. Blake?" old Driscoll said. "You must have been on your feet all the morning."

"And who'd look after every one if I did? Besides, sure the excitement is eating and drinking to me. Is your steak all right, Father James?"

"Excellent, thanks, excellent. Do sit down, Mrs. Blake."

"Troth, if I had the time itself, your reverence, there isn't the place. The kitchen table is crammed full, but through the dint of turning the settle into a table, all the men are seated now, thanks be to God. There's a relay of women to come. But sure they can hold out longer than the men. They wouldn't be worth much if they couldn't do that."

"They won't starve with all the food they're carrying about between their hands," Mike Blake said gloomily.

Mrs. Blake frowned. "Would you grudge them, Mike, the bite or the sup they can have between times, and all the fetching and carrying they're doing for ye? Try and swallow that turkey's egg, Father Ned. I boiled it special for you, knowing you were a citizen. It's more delicate within than a hen's egg, for a townsman like you. Mike there has a weakness for a duck's egg, but sure he has the stomach of a horse. Don't be trenching on the priest's lump sugar," she said in a fierce whisper to Mike. "Isn't there plenty of soft sugar at your elbow?"

Father James munched steadily at the beefsteak without once laying down his knife and fork. Father Ned fiddled with the turkey egg, and replaced it by a hen egg when Mrs. Blake's back was turned.

"I'll eat it and put the shell back on your plate, and she'll never know the differ," Mrs. Hinnissey said obligingly.

"Won't you have more tea?" Father Ned said, holding up the best teapot.

"Is it out of the priest's teapot? The Lord love you, Mrs. Blake'd never forgive me if she thought I did that. I'll wait till Bessy Reilly gets round with the tin one."

Even Mrs. Reardon, though she eyed her teapot enviously, did not dare to help herself from it. She was somewhat compensated by Mrs. Blake's whisper, "It's shining like a blaze of glory."

Mrs. Blake's willing helpers were kept busy filling cups, held out to intercept the passing teapots, and serving bread and butter, eggs, and cake.

"I had four, and that's not a bad morning's work for a man," Jack Hinnissey said, refusing a fifth egg. "I hear, master, that you're thinking of giving up Bourneen," he added, addressing Driscoll from the end of the table.

Father Mahon, who had finished with the steak and was just starting on an egg, frowned.

Driscoll glanced at him. "I'm thinking of it. Yes, I'm thinking of it," he answered, with another look at Father Mahon's lowered eyes.

"Faith, it's sorry I am that you won't be in it to belt my own children like you ought to have belted me," Hinnissey said heartily.

"Troth, if he gave you your due, his arm, God bless it, would be sore from trying to knock the devil out of you, Jack," Teigue Donlon said with a grin.

"It's the pity of the world you didn't banish the old boy out of him when you're hand was in, master," Mrs. Hinnissey said, beaming.

Driscoll chuckled. "I left that for you, ma'am," he said quietly.

"Is there any talk of who is to come after you?" Larry Reardon, with a side glance at Father Mahon, said to Driscoll.

"I dare say there is. It's his reverence that knows that."

"Now's your time, Mike, to put in a word for Maurice," Mrs. Blake whispered under cover of a bowl of eggs.

"Whist, woman, can't you see his eye on you?"

Father Mahon took out his handkerchief and wiped the remains of an egg off his mouth.

"I never discuss secular business at a station

house. "This is a place for religion only," he said, rising abruptly.

"After all my trouble, too!" Mrs. Blake murmured wearily.

She revived somewhat when Father Mahon said, in bidding her good-bye—

"Your son Maurice is growing into a fine man."

"He as much as gave me a hint that it would be all right," she whispered excitedly to Mike, while the priest was being helped into his overcoat.

"I heard the remark," Mike said stolidly. "You'll be reading a tune into an ass's bray next."

"There isn't much cuteness in you after all, Mike. Take my word that you'll find him ready for you if you run out with him now and broach the matter while Tom is tackling the mare."

For five minutes Father Mahon and Mike paced the road in front of the gate. The priest said nothing. Mike made two isolated remarks—"The harvest was very fine, thanks be to God," and "It's a hot day for this time of year." It was only when the priest's trap was halfway across the bawn that Mike said diffidently.

"Bourneen school, your reverence—my son, Maurice."

"A fine young man," Father Mahon said.

"He'd like to get the school, your reverence."

The priest frowned thoughtfully. "That's a horse of another colour," he said. "I'm not against him, mind you, Mike—not by any means. But it needs thinking over and talking over. It's a great responsibility I have in a matter of the kind, to the children of the parish, and to the government, and, last but not least, to the Church of God. Come up to-morrow night after dark and we'll help one

another to shed a light on it. I make no promise, but I've an open mind. I can tell you that much."

"Well?" Mrs. Blake said eagerly when Mike returned.

"I'm seeing him to-morrow night about it," Mike said doubtfully. "Anyway, he was more civil than ever I seen him before."

"I knew there was great virtue in a beefsteak," Mrs. Blake said joyfully.

CHAPTER III

AT half-past three in the afternoon of the day following the station at Mike Blake's, Father James Mahon leant over the iron gate of the narrow garden that separated his house from the main road leading from the village of Bourneen to the town of Liscannow. His soft felt hat was pulled well down over his eyes, to shade them from the almost level rays of the sun. A single, bare, elm tree on the other side of the road made a beautiful pattern against the burnished gold of the sky. The patch of sea in the distance by Liscannow glittered like a silver mirror ; while the clefts of the mountain, at the base of which the town seemed to nestle, were already a deep purple. Bourneen chapel and village on his left, usually gaunt and ugly under a prevailing grey sky, now glowed with genial warmth. But Father James was not interested in light effects. He had no eye for the brilliant colours, purples and greens and soft pinks, which the mixed slates on his church threw back to the sun. He saw only the stumpy tower of the barn-like building. It occupied his thoughts, in short, jerky spasms of annoyance and relief, at intervals when he was not moodily gazing at the road, thinking of nothing in particular ; or wondering why Father Malone was so late ; or counting the chances of Father Delahunty dropping in to dinner on his

way home from Liscannow ; or angrily asking himself why he had invited Father Delahunty at all when he met him accidentally in the road in the morning, especially as he didn't like him, and, moreover, as he would be in the way when Mike Blake called. The thought of Mike Blake brought him back to the church tower, and he resisted an interesting thought as to how his three bullocks were doing on Larry Reardon's land. It was a nuisance that the priest who built the church and tower didn't build the spire too. Not that the tower needed a spire, but it would have stopped the mouth of that new broom of a bishop, Dr. Hannigan. He scowled as he thought of Dr. Hannigan, an outsider brought into the diocese when he himself should have been made bishop. But, after all, he argued with himself, why shouldn't Hannigan push on the parish priests to build and improve churches and make a good show of activity in his returns to Rome ? It was well known that he didn't intend to settle for life at Liscannow, but had his eye on the bishopric of his native diocese of Droomeen which was richer and more important. No wonder that he'd work hard to create the impression at Rome that he was an active man ; and so pave his way to promotion. Father James tapped the lower bar of the gate with his boot and admitted, with a feeling of satisfaction in his own tolerance, that he would have done likewise in Hannigan's circumstances. And, there would be another chance of Liscannow diocese for him, James Mahon, if Hannigan left. Why not ? The Bishop of Droomeen was an old man and could not last long.

He watched with unseeing eyes a dark bank of cloud creep up and clutch the sun. The elm was

again a gnarled tree and no longer a vivid mystery of colour and line. The warmth had gone from the wind that blew in from the sea. Father James buttoned up his coat and walked the short gravel path, with rectangular plots of rank, untended, weedy grass on either side, towards his house. He stood for a moment to admire it. The oak graining on the hall door, the red brick chevron mouldings over the door and windows, the stucco trowelled off into squares, the green paint on the down pipe and eave shoots, were all happy suggestions of his own to the complaisant Board of Works architect who designed the house. Was it Delahunty who said it was stark and ugly? The fool! and he living in an old, thatched cottage, without the room or the dignity that a parish priest's house ought to have. The bishop had a word of praise for this beautiful house. That was to Hannigan's credit. After all, why shouldn't he, he thought, do his best to be friends with Hannigan? The great mistake of his life was fighting with the old bishop, Dr. Murray. It made him popular with some of the parish priests and got him their votes at the election for bishop on the old man's death; but it gave him a bad name with the bishops of the province, who ignored the priests' votes, passed him over, and secured the appointment of Hannigan. He frowned at the memory of this; but, in a moment, he laughed his harsh cackle and said aloud, "Pooh, pooh, a man must be sensible." He would build the spire, he decided, as he opened the front door with a latch-key. Or, at least, he would make a show of setting about it. Mike Blake should start the subscription list. He banged the door with a grim smile. If the spire wasn't built the money could go to

something else useful. It wouldn't be wasted anyway. And Hannigan would be pleased. Who knew what might happen if there was another election for bishop—with Hannigan's good will, and, maybe, the friendship of bishops he might meet at Hannigan's? All the efforts he had made to curb his temper with the priests, and the dinners he had lavished on them might not be wasted after all.

He hung his hat on a peg in the hall and was hardly seated in his study when Father Malone came in.

"I'm sorry I'm late," he said apologetically. "I had two sick calls running."

Father Mahon frowned and touched a bell-push by the fireplace.

"It's not often you find an electric bell in a country parish," he said, with returning good humour. "I like having things up-to-date—and I have what I like."

Father Malone smiled at a bookcase and took out a book. There was a timid knock at the door, and a weary-looking, elderly servant entered.

"Dish the dinner, Kate. We won't wait another minute for Father Delahunty. He can blame himself if he finds everything cold."

"Yes, your reverence."

"Now, you talk a lot about art and things, Father Malone," he said, when the servant had gone. "These walls are dried out by this, and I'm thinking of papering them. What colour would *you* put on them?"

Father Malone glanced at the bright green venetian blinds, the red plush window curtains, the American roll-top desk of light oak, the carpet with chocolate roses on a greenish-yellow background.

"I don't know," he said blankly. "Some neutral shade, perhaps—it would take some thinking. The plain grey of the plaster isn't at all bad. Why not let it alone?"

"And you're a light of the Gaelic League, no less, and write in the poet's corner of the *Liscannow News*! And you can't make up your mind about the colour of a wall-paper! Why, I'd paper every room in the house in my own mind in a minute, and a different paper on each of 'em."

"You would," Father Malone said, with an intonation that disturbed Father Mahon and put him on the defensive.

"I would, and I'd teach you Irish, too," he said, bridling.

"I know you could, and I only wish you would," Father Malone said, brightening.

Father Mahon was somewhat mollified by the compliment.

"The turkey is on the table, I'm sure, by this," he said, rising. "This Irish is a bad business," he added, as he opened the study door, "I'll have to put down my foot——"

There was a loud knock at the front door. Father Mahon opened it.

"Father Delahunty, you're more than welcome," he said heartily. "I almost despaired of you, but you're in the nick of time. Let me help you off with your coat, and we'll go straight in."

Father Delahunty held his hands over the fire in the dining-room for a few seconds.

"The food will heat you up better," Father Mahon said, sharpening a carving knife.

"I'll be as fit as a fiddle after a nip," Father Delahunty said, taking his seat and helping himself

to whiskey. "Here's to you both," he added cheerfully, his merry blue eyes twinkling. He took a few sips and smacked his lips. "If you were out after the hares all day like me, you wouldn't be getting fat, Mahon," he said, laughing. "We had a great day's coursing entirely, near the foot of the mountain beyond Liscannow. I won a couple of pounds, and that puts great heart in a man."

His open face, tanned russet from exposure, gleamed in the light of the lamp Kate now put on the table.

"Don't pull down them blinds, Kate," he said anxiously. "There's the kind of a sky out to-night that Father Malone there'd be making a poem on. I had one in me myself as the horse ambled along the road, but sorra word of prose, let alone poetry, could I find that'd say what I felt. If it was to describe a hound after a hare now, I could do it as well as any man."

Father Malone blushed, and stole a glance through the window. The elm tree was now a flat intricate pattern against the purple of the horizon, its top branches hidden in a belt of grey, while higher in the sky were the last silver gleams of the sun.

"It's a nuisance having windows facing the west, the sun bothers you so much in the summer evenings," Father Mahon said, busy carving and making comparisons between Father Delahunty's slim, wiry figure and his own. "I'm not fat. No one could call me fat with my figure," he added, handing a plate to Delahunty.

"You were always a bit vain of your figure, James. And sorra much bulge there's in it yet. If you'd only take to coursing——"

Father Mahon pursed his lips. "Alas! the cares of a big parish——"

"A score of bullocks out on grass—they take some looking after. True, they ought to give you exercise enough. Maybe it's age that's coming over us, James? We're both on the borders of fifty," Father Delahunty said cheerfully.

"Nonsense. I feel as young as ever I did. Not but I have troubles enough to worry me," Father James said with a frown.

"Not the curate?" Father Delahunty said, with a wink at Father Malone. "They're always a thorn in the flesh. I turn the parish over to mine, and he's as meek as a mouse since I let him be boss."

Father Mahon frowned, glared at Father Malone, opened his lips and shut them with a snap.

"The people, I meant," he said, after some hesitation. "They're getting beyond the beyonds. Not but that I'm able for them."

"You might be pulling the reins too tight," Delahunty said seriously.

"The day the priests of Ireland cease to be masters, it'll be a bad day for the Church—and for the country," Father Mahon said emphatically.

"Phew," Father Delahunty said, making a long face.

"I find the people easy to work with," Father Malone said, with some determination.

"Because you let them master you—it's a case of the dog wagging his tail," Father Mahon said crossly.

"Sometimes they wag me, sometimes I wag them; generally, we trot along comfortably together," Father Malone said, with good humour.

"A man after all is very like a greyhound," Father Delahunty said musingly.

Father Mahon bit his lip to restrain his anger. He laughed harshly.

"Wait till you've twenty-five years on the mission, like me—and Delahunty there, and you'll learn sense."

"I don't know. Babes and sucklings! you know, James?" Delahunty said. "I often learnt a great deal from a litter of young dogs."

"I'm not going to let any one, curate or people, turn my parish upside down," Father Mahon said, frowning into his plate. He gulped his food for a few minutes in silence.

Father Delahunty shrugged his shoulders and went on with his dinner.

"A present?" he said, nodding at the remains of the turkey, as he laid down his knife and fork.

"Oh, they're free-handed enough—if you keep 'em up to it," Father Mahon said gloomily.

Kate appeared at the door and beckoned eagerly to Father Mahon. When he noticed her he got up hastily and said—

"Draw your chairs round to the fire. The whiskey is at your elbow, and Kate'll bring in the hot water at once. The dinner was a bit late, and I forgot I appointed to see a man. I won't be long."

"Where is he?" he said to Kate in the hall.

"In the kitchen, your reverence. It's Mike Blake, and he said you expected him. Will you see him here in the hall, or in your study?"

"What did I tell you before when people come by appointment?" he said impatiently.

"You'll find the lamp lit. Sometimes you're

vexed at one thing, sometimes at another," she muttered in a flat voice without resentment.

He stood, picking his teeth, with his back to the fire, and admired his bookcase. The room was called a study partly because it was so marked on the architect's plans, and partly because there were books in it. Father James had been a prizeman in Maynooth, but he seldom read anything now except newspapers. Occasionally he read a text-book on canon law to assure himself of his own rights, and of the limits of a bishop's authority. He also refreshed his memory of moral theology for a few hours before the conferences which were held four or five times a year. He professed a love of literature, but never read any. His anger with Father Malone was often tempered by the contempt he felt for him because he had once found him absorbed in some book of poetry. He sometimes bought a paper-covered sensational novel at the bookshop in Liscannow, but rarely finished it. He was so interested in his own schemes that it bored him to read other people's imaginary adventures. He often sat for hours in front of the study fire, the poker in his hand, thinking of his cattle, or his investments, or the affairs of his parishioners—of the latter, always, however, in relation to himself. As he heard Mike Blake's heavy step coming along the linoleum-covered hall his eye rested on a vacant space in one of the walls. Dr. Hannigan had open shelves running round his whole library, he remembered. Yes, he would put shelves on that wall, and pick up books enough to fill them, at auctions, where they were always to be had for little or nothing.

He was so taken by this idea that he began to measure the vacant space by stepping the floor, and

did not notice Mike Blake standing at the open door. Mike coughed.

"Wait a minute, till I step this," the priest said, looking up and balancing himself carefully, one foot touching the other.

"Sit in front of the fire," he said, as he made a note on a sheet of paper at his desk.

Mike sat on the edge of a chair and laid his hat beside him on the floor.

Father James drew an armchair close to the fire and sat so that he could look at the fire or at Mike without altering his position. He crossed his legs, rested them on a corner of the fender, and clasped his hands as if in prayer.

"Well, Mike," he said, looking at the fire, "and what can I be doing for you?"

"Touching our little conversation yesterday, your reverence——"

"Yes, yes. I'm glad you called, Mike. You remember the bishop's sermon at the last confirmation?"

Mike scratched his head. "What with hearing so many of 'em, one every Sunday, and two, maybe, if it's a confraternity night, not to speak of holidays, they oftentimes go in one ear and out the other."

"About the spire."

"I remember it well now that you call it to mind. Sure we all thought it was a great romancer he was. And all the calls that was on us lately, too, drawing stone and gravel for this grand house, thanks be to God, and for the new porch in the chapel, and the new schoolhouse——"

"It's the new teacher'll get the benefit of that," Father James interrupted.

"Sure what I came to talk to you about——"

"The bishop was quite serious," Father James broke in, looking meditatively at the fire. "That spire has been on *my* conscience too, this many a year. We must build it, Mike. We must build it. For the credit of the parish, we must build it. I'd have done it long ago, only I didn't like to be putting too much of the substance of my poor people into stone and mortar. If I had the money by me I'd pay for it out of my own pocket. But what's the use of talking about that? and the drag there's on the few pence a priest has in a parish like this."

While the priest was speaking, Mike looked alternately at him and at the fire several times. He was puzzled, and thought that the fire, from which Father James seemed to be reading, would enlighten him. The unusual gentleness of the priest's voice troubled him; all he could say, when Father Mahon stopped, was—

"It's a power of money it'll take."

"It will. I can't put a public cess on at present—it'll give me enough to do to level up the dues. But I'm going to start a private fund to show the bishop we're in earnest. I'll head it with a hundred pounds."

"It's easy for your reverence to lift money from one pocket into the other," Mike said with an uneasy laugh.

The priest glared at him angrily, poked the fire and laughed harshly.

"We'll keep the matter between ourselves for the present. You're the first man I've mentioned it to," he said, ignoring Mike's remark.

"I'd as lief I wasn't, but as your reverence spoke of it, five pounds won't rob me."

Father Mahon stood up and frowned, his under lip for a moment almost touching his nose.

"I gave you credit for more sense, Mike Blake," he said, turning towards the fire and holding out his hands to the blaze. "You! a man with your farm bought, and a good slice of grass land thrown in, and your son, the schoolmaster, as good as settled in the world."

A slow smile crept over Mike's face. He screwed up his lips and fumbled in the pocket of his waistcoat for his pipe. He took it out and put it back hastily. He looked at Father James, who was gazing thoughtfully at the fire.

"Maybe I made it too little, would twenty-five——"

The priest only protruded his under lip.

"Forty?" Mike said tremulously.

Father James seemed to consider this, turned towards Mike, and shook his head doubtfully.

"If I make it the round sum of fifty," Mike said, standing up in his excitement, "it's the highest I can go."

"And a generous subscription it is, Mike. And a credit to yourself and your fine family. And now about this other business. Can you speak up for your son Maurice?"

"I can, then."

"Is he biddable?"

"His mother and myself always found him that."

"And a good warrant to attend mass and the sacraments?"

"There's no fault in him on that head."

"Well, then, tell him I'm glad to give the school to his father's son. And I promise I'll treat him well—if he'll be said and led by me."

"No one could speak fairer, and we're all beholden to your reverence," Mike said, reaching for his hat.

"I haven't asked you if you had a mouth on you, but I've a few priests within, and I'm too long from them as it is."

"Sure I never expected that, Father. The blessing of God on you. Mary'll be on the tenter-hooks till I tell her the news. She'll be a proud woman to-night."

When Father Mahon got back to his guests he was still frowning, but he was rubbing his hands together vigorously.

"You're as pleased as punch," Father Delahunty said, glancing from his face to his hands.

"I am. Whatever tricks the young people may be up to, thank God the old are still amenable to their Church and their priests. I've taken your advice," he added, laughingly, to Father Malone, "and given Bourneen school to Maurice Blake."

"Why that's splendid," Father Malone said excitedly. "I was afraid, from the way you took what I said of him, that you had some one else in your mind."

"A wise man doesn't rush an important affair," Father Mahon said sententiously.

"So that was it," Father Delahunty said dryly, holding his glass between him and the light.

CHAPTER IV

FOR some time after his father had set out for the priest's house Maurice Blake chatted with his mother in front of the fire in the kitchen. Tom was busy in the cowhouse and Hanny in the dairy. Mrs. Blake sat on a creopy, sewing, halfway between the lamp on the window and the fire, so that the light from both fell dimly on her work. Maurice stood, his arm resting on the wooden beam that ran across the top of the open fireplace.

"He's no farther than the five-acre meadow yet?" Mrs. Blake said.

"Hardly."

She plied her needle for a few minutes in a silence broken only by the asthmatic ticking of the old clock and the swish of thread through the cloth.

"He ought to be past the cross-roads by this?"

"About that. He's not a quick walker."

"No. He's getting leisurely on the feet."

"Why in the world does Father James want to see my father and not me?"

Mrs. Blake fastened her needle in the cloth and measured with the back of her hand.

"Sure why would you ask me? It is not easy to fathom what's in the back of Father James's mind. It wouldn't surprise me, though he's dark and haughty itself, if he wanted to pay a compliment to Mike. There'd be small wonder in it if he did, and

the way Mike always stood by the clergy, and his father before him. A horse and cart always at their bidding whenever they liked to call for it. And many a load of hay and straw when the priest was scarce, or a lock of oats itself, and the freedom of the gravel pit for any building the clergy had a hand in since the year of one. And quarried and carried by Mike himself for nothing at all. And the priest often getting paid for it, I'm told, by the government or the like. And carts for bringing home the turf. Not to speak of him being always among the foremost, for his means, at the dues. And the fat goose that I plucked with my own hands at Michaelmas and took to the parish priest's back door every year since I stepped across the threshold of this house, and maybe a pair of hens at Martinmas, and a turkey at Christmas, and an odd thing in between."

"I hope Father Mahon will be influenced by none of these things," Maurice said, flushing a little. "It's a government appointment, and I ought to get it on my merits or not at all."

"Sure no one knows better that you deserve it than Father Mahon himself; but you wouldn't grudge your father the satisfaction of being the first to hear the news, and his heart as set on you being in Bourneen as my own is."

Maurice tapped one of the flagstones with his boot. "I'd rather——"

"He ought to be passing the old mill, by now," Mrs. Blake interrupted.

"You won't mind if I go up and read awhile, mother," Maurice said with a smile.

"Sure I won't," she said with relief. "We're only making each other uneasy by our thoughts and the great errand Mike is gone on. Besides, the

needle is great company. Wait till I fill the quart bottle with hot water for you to put to your feet. It's chilly above."

He mounted the flat-runged ladder that served as a stairs, a lighted candle in an old-fashioned brass candlestick in one hand, the hot-water bottle covered with a piece of flannel in the other. The ladder, starting from the foot of the settle in the kitchen, led to the "big room," now handed over to Maurice's use, though usually it served as the dower house of widowed heads of the Blake family, or the bridal chamber of the eldest son if he married in the lifetime of both parents. Opening out of it was Tom's bedroom.

Maurice sat at a small deal table at the foot of the bed, a large structure enclosed by a wooden canopy on all sides except the front, which was curtained, and so placed as to be heated by the kitchen flue. He opened a book and began to read. Though he sat with his back to the warm wall and had the hot-water bottle at his feet he soon felt cold. He put on an overcoat and wrapped a rug about his knees. He turned a few pages of the book, an idealized history of medieval Ireland, but soon gave way to the dreams which this book always evoked. His eyes wandered to the guttering candle which seemed to be blown on by all the winds of heaven. For moments it burned with a clear flame. A blast up the open stair head made it flutter towards the bed, till another blast, creeping round the corner of the bed from the windows, almost set it straight again. A whistling wind from over the low partition, dividing the room from Tom's, drove the flame towards the book. Then all the winds seemed to rush to the open space above the rafters, rattled

and fought among the slates, swept down in a united phalanx, and for some doubtful seconds threatened to extinguish the candle. Then it burnt clear again.

Somehow, in some vague way, it typified Ireland for him. Buffeted now by one harsh wind, now by another, until she lay almost prone in the dust. Then, at intervals, the clear flame and the infinite promise !

Always in his imagination Ireland had been a woman. In the sad songs he remembered from his childhood she was often old and decrepit, sitting by a fireless hearth, forsaken and weary under a broken roof, but always with haunting eyes that looked straight into his soul. When he saw her young and radiant in other songs she had the same eyes of appealing beauty, sad even in their smile.

The wind had gone down and the faint light of the candle lost itself in the gloom above the rafters. Curious shadows flitted in dim corners. The fire-light from the kitchen danced on the wall by the stairhead. Maurice saw all the squalid details of the room : the rough uncarpeted floor ; the white-washed walls, stained green in patches where the rain had trickled down from the roof ; the few unpainted deal shelves that contained his books ; the battered tin trunk that held his best suit ; the rest of his clothes, hanging from pegs on the partition ; the wooden box, with a towel laid over it, that served as a wash-stand ; the other box that made a dressing-table, but this Hanny had decorated with muslin and ribbons. All his life he seemed to have been able to see the sordid, to see it keenly, to feel its pain. But always the lady of his dreams had been a refuge—from the stench of the manure heap when it stood in the bawn and pervaded the

whole house, from Father Mahon's scowling face on station days, from the stones that bruised his feet as he scampered barefooted to school as a boy.

He saw her now in the gleam of firelight dancing on the wall, tresses of shining hair at her waist, her beautiful mysterious face hidden in the shadows of the rafters, as he had so often seen her in the dawn and in the twilight, and at the back of the fire on winter nights when he sat on the hob listening entranced to his grandfather's tales of heroic deeds done for Ireland in the past.

Even then he knew that she was only the child of his imagination, but he loved her none the less well for that. She made him work and gave purpose to his life.

His mind went back to that first walk with Master Driscoll, when the teacher said that he was inclined to recommend him for a monitorship.

They passed a rath surmounted by a dismantled castle, and Driscoll told story after story : how, in that very fort, Guaire the High King had kindled hope in the heart of Ireland ; how Brian had washed the tears away from the face of Ireland for many a long day by a fierce fight that lasted far into the night. . . .

"There's no doing of great deeds like them in these days," he had wound up, with a sigh. "Still every man can do his little. Even a schoolmaster can do his share. Indeed, he can do great things for Ireland if he's only the right sort."

From that day Maurice had set his heart on being a schoolmaster. In the old thatched school-house beside the chapel, weather-beaten and dilapidated despite all Master Driscoll's efforts to keep it neat and trim, he dreamt dreams and saw visions.

All that the teacher knew he soon learned : such knowledge as counts with Boards of Education, and knowledge that Boards are suspicious of, great stores of traditional lore that coloured the whole country side with romance. He drank in too, incongruously enough, a hatred of the whole system and methods of the Board of Education, one of whose teachers it was his ambition to become.

"All the good I ever did as a teacher," Driscoll used to say, "I did in my own garden in odd half-hours before school or after and during recreations. The Board forced me to train a boy to be a bad clerk, and I did it, God forgive me ; but for my penance, or maybe because I loved it, in that few roods of garden that you see there I tried to teach him to be a man, to know and love the land he was reared on and the things that grew and lived on it."

These and other memories of his childhood and youth came back to Maurice as he watched the firelight flicker ; and the memory of a few unhappy years in Liscannow as an assistant teacher, and his two years at the Training College. . . .

Then he tried to see himself as teacher of Bourneen school. Much as he had dreamed and thought of it in the past, only vague and blurred images emerged now—of himself weak and helpless, struggling with some sinister force. . . .

He heard his father's step on the gravel, the latch lifted, his mother's, "Oh, Mike, I didn't think you could be back yet," a whispered conversation, a long-drawn "Oh," in his mother's voice, more whispers, then his mother again, "God'll make up for it. Thanks be to His holy name that I'll have Maurice near me all my life."

He had got the school. All his old hopes began

to revive. He jumped up and had already blown out the candle when his mother shouted, "Maurice, Maurice." When he was halfway down the ladder she said excitedly—

"Sure I knew you'd get it."

"You did," Mike said grimly, rattling the tin tobacco-box and the old penknife in his right-hand trousers pocket.

"Did he make any difficulties?" Maurice asked, when he got to the floor.

Mike looked gloomily at the fire, but Mrs. Blake said effusively—

"Sorra one, only a few questions that a child could answer. Rouse yourself, Mike. He's always moonstruck after seeing Father James—he has that paralysing effect on him. Though the priest was in the best of humours—a fine young man, he said you were."

Maurice was not quite satisfied, and asked his father for an exact account of what took place.

"It's up to you now, Mike. Rack your brain and tell the boy what happened," Mrs. Blake said anxiously.

Mike filled his pipe with some deliberation. When he had lit it and taken a few long puffs, he began a detailed narration of the interview, at which, it seemed, all the merits of Maurice, from a child up, if forgotten by his father, were mentioned with much fervour by the priest.

Maurice tried to stop him several times, but Mike, having once started, would not be checked.

"There it's all for you now," he wound up. "I wouldn't swear to every remark being made in them exact words. But sorra word I've spoken to you now that one or other of us didn't think anyway."

With this salve to his conscience Mike fell into silence. But Maurice had long since ceased to listen. He was thinking of what he would teach and what he wouldn't teach.

Hanny came in and asked, "Has he got it?"

Her mother nodded.

Hanny said, "Thank God," and proceeded to lay the table for supper.

"Put on the currant cake that's left over from the station, in honour of the night that's in it," Mrs. Blake said.

Mike was gloomy over his supper, Mrs. Blake and Maurice thoughtful. Hanny cast admiring glances at Maurice in the intervals of helping every one.

Towards the end of the meal Tom entered singing.

"What news?" he asked eagerly.

"The best," Hanny said cheerfully. "But don't be sitting down with them hands. The basin is on the chair by the back door."

He washed his face and hands. "It's a poor job, Maurice, my boy, teaching a lot of gossoons; but sure, as you like it, I'm glad you got it," he said from the middle of the floor, scrubbing his face and neck vigorously with a towel. "Did the big man make a struggle to put in a bullock on us on the head of it?"

"He didn't," Mike said crossly.

"Moreover," Mrs. Blake intervened, "he said he always had a liking for Maurice ever since he used to serve mass at the Bourneen altar."

"It's many a clout he gave him on the side of the head by the way of showing it," Tom said, taking his seat at a corner of the table.

"It's too free ye are in discussing the clergy," Mike Blake said. "There's neither luck nor grace in it."

"That's true enough," Mrs. Blake said.

"Troth, they get a skelp of the tongue now as well as another," Tom said grimly.

Maurice rose from the table and took his hat off the back of the door.

"I think I'll take a run down to see Master Driscoll."

"Do then, agra. He'll be glad to hear of it," Mrs. Blake said.

"I'd be glad to go a bit of the way with you, only I'll be taking the opposite direction," Tom said, his mouth full.

"Reardons again," Mrs. Blake said, with a sigh.

Maurice lingered on the road. A high moon seemed to race through the sky as thin filmy clouds scudded across it, lighting up the old landmarks in vivid flashes: the robber cavern of his very young days, now, alas! to his grown-up eyes, only a rather shallow ditch covered with blackberry bushes; the twisted thorn tree under which the leprechaun sat and mended brogues or mayhap hammered sovereigns on his little anvil; the gate of the five-acre meadow, past which one had to hurry at the coming on of dark, lest the dead coach, drawn by headless horses, should dash through with its ghostly freight from the big house that once stood in the middle of the field—a great house with a hundred windows, lit by countless candles, sometimes seen by the unwary and always a sure presage of death. To-night there was no feeling—half fear, half hope—of seeing leprechaun or coach. Still his heart beat wonderfully. The great river, over which he had

stood patiently for hours as a boy fishing with a bent pin baited with bread crumb, was only the tiny stream whose faint murmur he scarcely heard as he walked, and up which no trout had ever ventured. Yet, another and a greater dream had not been shattered. He was to be schoolmaster at Bourneen. This dazzling dream, with which at first he only played, as he played at keeping house with Hanny under the privet bushes in the garden, trudging along barefooted at Tom's heels by this very road, two sods of turf under his arm and a strap of books slung on his back, was at last about to come true. Nor had the glamour gone when the play became a set purpose. The game of wielding a ferule at a rostrum had yielded to a higher ideal. He was to continue Master Driscoll's work, to help in the forming of men and women, to . . .

He laughed now as he remembered the language in which he used to clothe his ideal, "to help them to lift the mantle of sorrow off the shoulders of Kathleen ni Houlihan."

Father Mahon's dining-room was still alight as he passed. He caught a glimpse of the priest's side face through the uncurtained window. It brought back painful memories which he tried in vain to shake off: the terror of the children when Father James stalked into the schoolroom and scowled at them; his rudeness to Master Driscoll; that terrible Sunday in Bourneen chapel when the priest had struck him across the face with the wisp of a cow's tail used for sprinkling holy water, because, while holding the basin, he had pushed against the priest's elbow. He felt the weal on his cheek now and the coil of the tail round the back of his head, and the holy water oozing down his neck.

All that was in the past, he said to himself, shrugging his shoulders. And perhaps the priest had changed? It was a good omen that he had been so civil and pleasant to his father in their interview to-night.

The moon, breaking from under a cloud as he entered the little village, shone on the thatch of the half-dozen labourers' cottages that led to Clancy's big public house and general shop opposite the chapel gate. A few more cottages, two public houses, the post office with sweets and thread and a trimmed hat in its small window, a police barrack, Father Malone's cottage, a forge, and Maurice was at the gate of the schoolhouse, with nothing of village beyond but Master Driscoll's cottage and the corrugated iron store of the Bourneen Agricultural Society.

He stood for a few minutes gazing at the school. He could just read "Bourneen Mixed National School," in white letters on a black board over the door. Notwithstanding Master Driscoll's efforts at flower-beds, and the creepers which already climbed to the window sills, the new building looked bleak and cold in the wan light. He checked a sigh for the old school with its thatched roof and the rambler roses twining about the wooden porch and losing themselves in the thatch, by the thought that in this month the rose trees would have been dead too. In spring these banked-up flower-beds would be gay with colour, and the creepers no longer little strips of rag.

In response to his knock at the door of the schoolmaster's cottage, Driscoll shouted "Come in." He pushed open the door and found the old man seated in a rush armchair in the

living-room and kitchen, on which the front door gave.

"Maurice, is it?" he said, pushing his spectacles up on his forehead, and shading his eyes from the lamp-light with his hand. "Shut the door tight and draw the curtain over it. There's a cruel draught on the fire these cold nights."

He pushed forward a second rush armchair, took a box of churchwarden pipes from a shelf, and carefully selecting two, put them and a tobacco jar on the table behind the two chairs.

"I believe I've got the school. Father James promised my father to-night," Maurice said, taking a seat.

Driscoll stood up and shook Maurice's hands. "I'm gladder of that than if you brought a crock of gold in on the floor to me," he said with emotion.

He held the hands for a while, gave them another pressure before letting them go. Turning to the open turf box beside the fender, he threw several sods on the blazing fire and watched them catch the flame.

"You were always more like a son of my own to me than a stranger," he said musingly.

He sat down, handed a pipe to Maurice, and filled and lighted the other. He puffed slowly, his eyes on the glowing turf which lighted up his strong rugged face. His mobile lips twitched a little, and his bushy eyebrows made curious shadows on his broad forehead. His blue eyes had the fearless simplicity of a child's, and some of a child's depth of wonder. The front of his hair, brushed straight up on his forehead, looked dark in the shadow; but behind, where it fell in

locks over his collar, the lamplight showed it to be a silky white.

"Where are you going to live?" he asked, without moving his eyes off the fire.

"At home—at least until Tom marries. I dare say I must leave then."

Driscoll moved his chair sideways so as to get a good view of the room. About three-fourths of it was covered with rush matting. The white walls were hung with steel engravings: Robert Emmett's speech during his trial, a sitting of the Irish House of Commons during the debate on the Union, Wolfe Tone, a chalk drawing in profile of the beautiful head of John O'Leary, and other patriotic subjects. Well-filled open book-shelves occupied the space on both sides of the front window, from the floor to the boarded ceiling. A rough carpenter's bench stood under the window at the back. On it were a box of tools, two trays of bulbs, a bundle of what looked like dried weeds, and a microscope.

"All I ever use of this house is the kitchen here, and my bedroom there," pointing to a door on the left of the fireplace. "You never saw the rooms at the other end?"

Maurice shook his head. Driscoll went to the standing desk by the front window, took a key from a drawer, hesitated a moment, and put it back.

"I'll show 'em to you another time. I'm too happy to-night to do it," he said, taking his seat again. "But if you come and live in 'em, you'll give me most of the happiness I'm likely to have on this side of the grave."

Maurice was deeply moved. He had heard of the rooms ever since he was a child. Rumour, starting from Bessy Reilly, the old woman who

spent some hours every day in what she called "doing for Master Driscoll," and what he called "messing my house upside down," gave a glowing description of the two rooms and their furniture. All Bessy had said was that they were "finer furnished than any room in Father Mahon's house itself," but this had grown in other mouths to "finer than any room in the castle of Dublin or in Durrisk Manor itself." But what moved Maurice was not the offer of well-furnished rooms, but the offer of these rooms at all. For it was well known that they had been unused for over thirty years; ever since Ellen McRory died, a week before the day fixed for her marriage with Dan Driscoll. They had been fitted up for her, and at regular intervals since, Driscoll aired and dusted them and lighted fires in both the sitting and bedroom.

"Those!" Maurice said. "I couldn't dream of it. Besides, you would hate it?"

Driscoll smiled gently. "One time I might, but that was many a year ago. If they're empty now, it's because I'm a lonely man without any one to fill them. She wouldn't mind it, and why should I?" His voice shook a little. He got up, took out the key again, and taking the lamp in his hand, unlocked the sitting-room door.

They walked quickly through the small rooms, one opening out of the other. Maurice had a vague recollection, when they sat again by the kitchen fire, of faded pink wall-paper, a faded Brussels carpet, some mahogany chairs, and a sofa covered with black hair cloth.

"There's many a man'd tell you," the old man said, lighting another pipe, "that two of a trade never agree, and that you'd be more comfortable

living away from the man into whose shoes you stepped."

Maurice opened his lips, but Driscoll held up his pipe.

"Not a word now," he said. "Take time to think—but if you come, you'll make me a happy man."

CHAPTER V

"How is your new assistant doing with you?" Master Driscoll said, looking at the brilliant red ball low on the horizon.

"It's a sign of frost," he went on without waiting for a reply, "and it'll likely be a hard, dry night. My rheumatism is gone, I might say, only that my little finger is crooked for good, I'm afraid. I might be going with you after all to the Hallow Eve doings up at Reardons'."

"Of course you will," Maurice said heartily.

"I'm getting too old for that kind of merriment."

"Nonsense, it's young you're growing," Maurice said, laughing.

The old man busied himself with the lamp. "There's no strength to read in the light of the sky on an evening like this," he said, lighting a match. "It was the luck of heaven that sent you in on the floor to me. I didn't think I'd be alive nine months after giving up the school, and I'd have moped myself to death only for you. Having them classes down in the garden behind the house here is a great God-send to me."

He moved about quietly, shut the door, drew the curtains, put a kettle on the fire, and laid the table for tea. Maurice cut bread and butter, and brought a pot of jam from a cupboard in the sitting-room.

"We're going to have a real Samhain feast of

it," Driscoll said, taking a seat by the fire, a book in his hand.

Maurice stood with his back to the fire, filling a pipe.

"I'm not keeping you from your reading?" the old man said uneasily.

"Too strict you are with me, if any. You're worse than when I was a gossoon. But I'll have a free time to-night, no matter what hints you give me," Maurice said with mock severity.

A shadow passed across the old man's face. "I'm not a burthen to you in any way, Maurice? I hadn't the courage to put it to you before," he said diffidently.

Maurice looked grave. "A burthen? You're more of a help to me than you ever were in your life before, and that's saying a good deal. And what's more, you're doing a bigger share of the real work of the school than I am," he said, with obvious sincerity.

"I've my own opinion about that," Driscoll said, looking at Maurice affectionately. "But whether I'm a nuisance or a help, my heart is easy now, and I'll not open my lips on the subject again," he went on happily. "We'll have our supper a little early, about six or so, and then we can be at the Reardons' in plenty of time."

He listened to the faint simmering of the kettle for a while. "It's far from the boil yet," he said, shutting the book which he hadn't looked at, and putting it on the table. "As you're set on doing nothing we might as well talk of one thing and another for a bit."

Maurice lolled in his armchair, his feet on the hob.

"I was asking you about your new assistant, Miss Devoy," Driscoll said.

"Oh, the work-mistress? Not so bad; but she thinks I've nothing else to do but point her pencils for her."

"She's that kind, is she?" Driscoll said with a smile. "The glimpse I had of her she looked as if she had an eager eye."

"The worst of her is that she doesn't know Irish or care for it, and I asked Father James to appoint some one who could take an Irish class."

"It's not that she's thinking of, nor he either," Driscoll said chuckling. "I——"

Thick steam had been pouring from the spout of the kettle for some time; now the pressure lifted up the lid and made it rattle.

The old man stopped speaking and jumped up. "The tea won't be worth drinking unless I wet it at once," he said, seizing the tea caddy.

After tea they set out for the party at Reardons'. Mrs. Reardon had given the invitation in the chapel-yard on Sunday before mass. "Any time after the cows are milked. Jim Mescall, the blind fiddler, is coming, and he might have some tale of Hallow Eve that you never heard tell of yet, Master Driscoll."

"It's footing it to the music ye young people'll be, and not listening to old tales," Driscoll said, as he and Maurice walked along briskly.

A benevolent moon blinked at them from a clear sky. Here and there a branch glittered with the beginnings of frost, and the mud of the rutty road crackled to their tread. The thin, windless air was almost warm on their cheeks.

"They've taken to the Irish wonderfully,"

Maurice said defensively, "and they're making a great success of the bank and the store."

"Thank God, they're knocking fun out of it, too. It doesn't make Tom less anxious for the Irish that he often has the chance of reading out of the one book with Minnie Reardon."

"I don't know," Maurice said doubtfully.

"Wait till you feel the like."

"My work will always be enough for me."

Driscoll laughed cheerfully. "Young fellows like you always say that. You'll know the differ when the fire touches you."

Half-way down the boreen which connected Larry Reardon's house with the Liscannow road they heard the strains of Jim Mescall's fiddle in a lively jig tune. Despite the frost several young men and women stood around in groups in front of the house. Lamps on the window sills of the kitchen and the room cast feeble rays into the moonlight, but inside the open door a jug, the corner of the dresser, hands and faces shone like gold bronze in the ruddy glow of the turf fire.

"God save all here," Driscoll said at the threshold.

"And you too, master, and the young master, too. Ye're fine and early, thanks be to God," Larry Reardon said, shaking hands.

"You're making a great place of it, Larry."

"It might be worse," Larry said, standing back and giving a pleased glance at a new, two-storied, slated addition to the old thatched house. "Owning the land gives a man great courage in the way of building. If the slates look down on the thatch itself, it's cold comfort there's in them on a winter's night. Sorra one of me'd sleep under a slate while

I've the thatch to cover me ; not if you gave me the wealth of the world. But sure the women—the Lord give 'em sense—think they're genteel. But let ye be coming in. The people aren't near gathered yet, and there's no right face put upon things, only Jim Mescall rasping away on the fiddle to pass the time by the way of no harm."

The furniture in the kitchen had been pushed back close to the walls. Guests sat on chairs and tables, on the settle, and on the hob, or lounged against the dresser and cupboards. The centre of the flagged floor was bare of everything except a large wooden tub half-filled with water. Suspended from a rafter above the tub were an apple and a dip candle, tied close together in the forked loops of a stout string about five feet from the floor.

"Come and sit beside me here," Mrs. Blake said from the hearth. "By dint of watching, the woman of the house kept these two seats for ye, though 'tis little either of ye deserves it, the one for deserting his old mother, and the other for enticing him off."

"Old, indeed !" Driscoll said. "'Tis you had the light foot for a dance, Mrs. Blake, and there's no signs of it failing you yet."

"True for you, master," Jack Hinnissey said from the settle. "You'll see her footing it yet before the night is out."

"It's a height of preparations they've made here, anyhow, for a great night of it," she said graciously. "Who are them within in the room, Maurice ? You've better eyesight than me."

He looked at the group around the fireplace in the room, the boarded floor of which had also been cleared.

"Minnie and her mother," he said, "and Hanny and Miss Devoy and Mrs. Crawford and—and a strange girl."

"That must be Mrs. Crawford's niece—a girl by the name of Alice Barton. Minnie was telling me last night that she was going to ask her. She wasn't too sure if she'd come, for her father has some grand situation in Dublin, a couple of hundred pounds a year, I'm told, and you never know what kind of airs them sort of people'll put on. But likely she takes after the Crawfords—decent poor people, though they're Protestants itself. She's of the same brand of religion herself, I hear; not that that's agin her, poor thing, and she born to it. Going round the country, she is, teaching the people how to keep hens and ducks and the like, and some Government Board in Dublin paying her big money for doing it. A slip of a girl like her!" she added sceptically.

Maurice heard everything his mother said. But all the time he was watching Alice Barton's figure, at the corner of the fender, silhouetted against the light. The dim light of the candle on the mantelpiece, passing through her loose hair, transformed it into gold. The dull lamp in the window left her face almost in shadow, but the firelight caught her curved chin and mouth, and the short upper lip with a touch of wilfulness, and the nose with the slightest tilt upwards. Her whole body seemed instinct with gracious curves, from her instep on the fender to the line which her hair made against her forehead.

"That girl of the Devoys' thinks a lot of herself," Mrs. Blake said critically. "It's no wonder, I suppose, and all Father Mahon is doing for her."

Maurice's eyes wandered to the stocky figure

beside Alice Barton. The light, which gave a warm glow to Alice Barton's profile, was reflected in a harsh glare from the high cheek-bones of Agnes Devoy.

"She's a relation of his, isn't she—a niece or something?" he said indifferently.

"Niece, indeed!" Mrs. Blake said, tossing her head. "If she was as near as that to him, he'd have her married long ago to a lawyer or doctor within in Liscannow. She's only a second cousin once removed, or it's not a schoolmistress he'd make of her, and poor at that. It's as plain as two eyes in a cat what he's aiming at in putting her in on you in Bourneen. He could have done better for her in the way of schoolmistressing, I'm told, down in the Strand girls' school, only that he had you in his eye for her. She's not much to look at, but you might do worse—easily," she added, with a thoughtful frown. "It'd be a great back to you entirely to have the priest for a relation."

"Hush, mother!" he said, with a frown, "the people'll hear you talking nonsense."

Jim Mescall had put aside his fiddle and was arguing vigorously with Master Driscoll on Hallow Eve traditions. The fiddler said that all the life had gone out of them compared with what they were in his young days, when he had the sight in his eyes. It was many a long day since the fairy music was heard by the blessed well on the road beyond, as the clock struck twelve on Hallow Eve night. And the things that happened when you passed lead through a key, or looked into a tub of water, not to speak of looking into the blessed well under the light of the moon, weren't lucky even to talk about. The "good people" only appeared

now to a few dark men like himself, who, he added vehemently, mightn't be so blind after all as them that had eyesight.

"I often heard my father say—God rest his soul"—Jack Hinnissey broke in, "that the good people were put in a temper because they couldn't understand the drift of the English that we all took to speaking."

"Then they'll soon be in humour again with all the Irish that's springing up everywhere," Driscoll said genially.

"Yerra, leave the good people be—they don't like being talked about," Mrs. Reardon said, approaching the fire. "Leave 'em to Jim Mescall, and he'll put the comether on 'em when he starts playing rightly. It's the best of friends he's with 'em, and he often playing to 'em in the dead of night under a thorn bush. Come, Tom Blake, and make a start at diving for the apples."

"It's a deep meaning there's in that itself, but it's little any one knows about it now," Jim Mescall said, hugging his fiddle between his knees, and turning his sightless eyes towards the blaze.

"There's the height of fun in it, anyway," Mrs. Reardon said, taking a skib of apples off the dresser and throwing a few into the tub of water.

"A man might as well begin to make a fool of himself first as last," Tom said with a grin.

He took off his coat and waistcoat, loosened the collar of his shirt, and rolled back the sleeves. Amid shouts of laughter he knelt on the floor and tried to catch one of the floating apples with his mouth. His head disappeared under the water, and rose again, spluttering, without the apple.

"Well tried, bedad !"

"Angle it in at the side, Tom."

"Try suction on it ; the teeth is no good."

Advice, serious and derisive, was plentiful from the excited crowd surrounding the tub. After half a dozen fruitless efforts Tom stood up, victorious, an apple between his teeth.

"I'd never forgive you if you didn't get it," Minnie Reardon said, handing him a towel.

He whispered in her ear. She blushed and laughed.

"It's the cheek of the world you have over a trifle like that," she said, pushing him away.

Young and old followed one another at the tub, with varying success, but always to the intense enjoyment of the onlookers.

"I love these old customs," an eager voice said behind Maurice.

"There's more sport in the dancing, though Jim Reardon wasn't bad at the apple. I suppose you don't have the like of this in Dublin, Miss Barton ?" his sister Hanny said.

Before his sister said the name he had known it must be Miss Barton. The voice seemed to belong inevitably to the girl he had seen in the room. He got up and offered her his seat.

"My brother Maurice," Hanny said.

Alice Barton made a little smiling bow, but said that she saw better standing. The tub was now removed. She eagerly watched Larry Reardon light the candle beside the apple on the string. He twisted the string, let it go suddenly, and the apple and candle revolved in a wide circle.

The more adventurous of the company tried to bite the apple as it circled.

Alice Barton caught Maurice's arm, "It's

dangerous," she said excitedly, her eyes fixed on the candle.

Her touch thrilled him, but he said lightly, "The worst that happens is a mouthful of unsavoury candle grease."

"Oh!" she said in a relieved tone, releasing her hold on his arm, and giving her whole attention to the game.

Her hair was brown he saw now, as he looked her over approvingly, the brown that becomes gold at the least excuse: a stray strand on her forehead sparkled as the firelight fell on it. Her eyes were brown too, almost black in this light. Sad in repose, because of the shadows of her long curled eyelashes, they lit up her whole face when she smiled.

Jim Mescall began to tune his fiddle impatiently.

"Pull down the apple and candle by accident like, and then we can have the dance," Minnie Reardon whispered to Tom.

Before he had made up his mind as to how the accident was to happen, Mrs. Reardon cut the string with a scissors, saying—

"Hand round the apples and the nuts, Minnie. And, Jim, you might be loosening your fingers with a tune while we're eating, so that they'll be supple for the dance tunes."

"There's no great call on them to be supple with the people that's in it now," Mescall said gloomily. "All the old spirit has gone out of their limbs. Besides, I might be grinding an apple and a nut myself."

"And there's a drop in the bottom of a bottle that might put courage into you," Mrs. Reardon said soothingly.

"It might then," he said in a more hopeful tone.

The skib of apples and a bowl of hazel nuts were handed round. Some of the guests roasted their apples on live embers round the hearth. The younger people put nuts beside the fire and watched excitedly till they exploded.

"That's mine," Hanny said.

"It isn't; it's mine," Minnie Reardon claimed, as a nut jumped into old Driscoll's lap.

"I'm afeared I'm done for this Saraft—if ye can make up your minds which of ye I'm bound to put the ring on. There's no going back on a nut," he said solemnly, his eyes twinkling. "What do you say, Jim?"

"There's more in it than meets the eye even of a dark man," Mescall said with interest. "Could any one say for certain who the nut belonged to?"

Hanny and Minnie drew back blushing. "Yerra, master, 'tis you were always a great warrant to joke," Minnie said uneasily.

"I call ye all to witness that neither one nor the other of them'll have me," Driscoll said dolefully.

In the laugh that followed the girls escaped, and fussily helped Mrs. Reardon at the dresser.

"There, now," she said at last, "you might tell Jim to strike up, Minnie. Everything is ready. There's buttermilk and separated milk and, though the cows are going dry itself, a drop of new milk for the young people that might be thirsty at the dance. We never had a night of the kind before without a half-barrel of porter," she added, addressing some guests near by, "but the curate is so much agin porter sprees that we thought it better to give in. There'll be a cup of tea for old women like myself

on the table in the corner of the room ; and maybe Larry'll find something in the cupboard for an odd old man."

"I wouldn't doubt Larry to get the blind side of the curate," Jack Hinnissey said, laughing. "The man that'd miss porter and he getting a nip of the hard stuff'd be finding queer fault with his food."

"There's no fault in the curate," Tom Blake said seriously. "If he's hard on the drink itself, it's time some one was down on it. It's the parish priest we ought to stand up against if we had the courage of a mouse, and he scattering innocent dances like this with a stick."

"Whist, Tom. Miss Devoy might hear you," Mrs. Reardon said anxiously.

"Why did you ask her here then ?"

"Sure she's safer mixed up in an affair of the kind than maybe hearing tell of it and carrying tales," Mrs. Reardon said, with a shrewd wink.

"There's only one way to meet a bully, and that's to stand up to him," Tom said, squaring his shoulders.

"That's only gossoon's talk, Tom Blake," Mrs. Reardon said dryly. "You're old enough to know better. What happened to Dick Fahy the time he lifted his hand against Father James? Paralysed it was that same night. I'll take right good care there won't be any row with the priest on my floor. Haven't I Tim Daly, our labouring man, stationed on the road outside to give warning if he hears the noise of a car, for fear it might be Father James going to a sick call or the like, so that we could stop down the dance and Jim tuck away his fiddle."

Tom muttered something which was lost in the

strains of "The Wind that shakes the Barley." After a preliminary flourish, while partners were being selected, mostly by the young women, Mescall settled down steadily to a long programme of jigs, reels, and hornpipes, with an occasional quadrille (though that wasn't rightly an Irish dance, Mescall complained). The elders sat around in small groups and discussed politics and farming and likely marriages for next Shrovetide ; or, when tapped on the shoulder by Larry Reardon, accompanied him with an air of mystery to the room, and returned, wiping their mouths, prepared to take a more genial view of life. Jim Mescall, playing with vigour, carried on a whispered conversation with Master Driscoll on old Samhain customs, that were old, he said, before St. Patrick himself saw the light. Mike Blake consulted Maurice as to some difference of opinion between the agricultural society and the agricultural bank ; being a director of both he was troubled as to how he could "divide up against himself in case he took sides." Maurice was interested in the dispute. Both projects were linked with his school, the language, Home Rule, in his vision of a new Ireland. He had already made a plan for the adjustment of this petty quarrel. But to-night it obstinately evaded him. Only that morning he had thought it out in all its details. He was secretary of the little bank and had undertaken to find a solution. He had found it. But where was it now ? He had the appearance of an intent listener—a puckered brow and a far-away expression in his eyes. His father's whispering voice, almost at his ear, seemed curiously distant. He caught the words "bank" and "store," and sought some meaning of them in the smouldering sods on

the hearth, in a shining old lustre jug on the dresser. Then his eyes followed the movements of an eight-handed reel. His brow cleared though his eyes were not less absorbed. His father's voice became an indistinct murmur, a sort of placid undertone to Jim Mescall's music. Bank and store were forgotten in the great content with which he watched the girl in black pick her way with graceful and confident ease through one of the complicated figures of the dance. She gave a charm even to Mescall's harsh, staccato rasping on the fiddle. There was something strangely pleasant in the swish of her skirt, in the curve of her arm as she held out a hand to a partner, in the faint flush of her cheeks fading into the deeper red of her lips. For a moment her eyes met his, great lustrous pools that seemed to flash vivid colour, and then he saw only the white nape of her neck and a loose curl. . . .

"You're not listening to a word I say," Mike Blake said loudly, as the music stopped.

"Oh yes," Maurice said with a happy smile. "What you've got to do is this. . . ." It had all come back to him in a flash the moment the dance had ended.

"There's some sense in what you say. It shows you were listening anyway, though I was ready to swear you weren't. I might do worse than follow your advice," Mike said ungraciously.

He danced with her once. Her thin shoes troubled him. Wouldn't her feet get hurt on the rough stone floor? She smiled. Dancing made one forget all that. Jack Hinnissey shouted—

"Bedad, 'tis you have the light foot, Miss Barton. Like a rubber ball you are touching the floor."

Maurice was a little annoyed by the grotesque image ; but she laughed, and he forgot his annoyance in the music of the laugh.

"That's a great compliment," she said demurely. "And he's the best step dancer in the room too. And I never seeing a reel danced till a year ago. What do you think of that ? "

They were separated for a moment and he could not say what he thought. He bungled the figure and brought a frown to Miss Devoy's face, ignoring her outstretched hand. A year ! why he could imagine her stepping into the Reardons' kitchen without ever having seen a reel before, and dancing it better than any one there. But all he said when they danced together again was—

"Where did you learn ? "

"At a Gaelic League dancing class at Drumcondra."

He said that he must have been within a few steps of her at the time—at the Training College. She frowned at this, and admitted, on being questioned, that she did not think much of Training Colleges : they made machines of people, and weren't in touch with the real needs of the country. He spoke of Master Driscoll : she thawed a little, but said maliciously—

"He hadn't the soul ground out of him in one of those training barracks."

Meekly Maurice put in a defence for trained teachers—"there were some who tried to keep their souls."

"Maybe there are," she said doubtfully.

All this was in snatches. Dancing absorbed her, and speech, for the moment, was only an incident. Long since the dancing had ceased to matter for

Maurice, except as a broad chasm that divided him from the next sound of her voice.

He swung her almost into Hanny's arms as Mescall drew the last creaking chord. Hanny, who had just come in through the open kitchen door with Jim Reardon in her wake, said shyly—

"There's a beautiful moon outside, and it's not so stuffy there as in here."

"One minute then, I mustn't miss a dance," Alice said, taking the shawl Hanny offered her and wrapping it round her shoulders. Maurice followed her out and they stood in front of the door.

The ground was hard. The white rime on the grass and on the bare trees sparkled. In the shadow of the house Minnie Reardon was bent over the tub of water, which had been removed from the kitchen to make room for the dancing.

"I can see nothing but my own image," she said regretfully.

"I bet you can, now," Tom Blake said, bending over her.

"What's the good of that when it's the image of your own face I see, and not of a spirit in the likeness of you?"

"As if my own face wasn't better than a spirit's any day."

"Be off with you, now, out of that," she said, pushing him away, "or some one'll see you."

"Sorra one of me cares if the whole barony seen me," he said, kissing her.

Minnie laughed softly. After a minute they walked hand in hand towards the road.

Jim Mescall began another tune. Maurice made a movement to go in, but Alice did not stir.

Her eyes were fixed speculatively on Tom and Minnie as they disappeared round the gate.

"Did she expect to see anything?" Alice said in a hushed voice.

He looked at her face. The excitement and glow of the dance had died away. In this light her face was as cold as the moon. The white priestesses of the forest, of whom he had read in some old Celtic tale, must have looked like her, he thought, a little bitterly. For years he had seen the love-making of Tom and Minnie, had laughed at it and thought it foolish. To-night it had moved him, and he felt a dull aching pain. . . .

"Don't you believe in the old powers?" she asked, as he remained silent, fidgeting with his feet.

"I don't know," he said crossly.

The tone of his own voice made him angry with himself. Why should he be angry with her? He pulled himself together and said banteringly—

"I thought Protestants had thrown over all these old beliefs."

She looked at him curiously. "There are older things than Protestantism, or Catholicism either, that still move the world," she said musingly.

"Oh! the holy well on the road below," he said lightly. "Minnie Reardon is probably looking for Tom's image in it this minute."

Alice laughed. "She knows the oldest wisdom—perhaps," she said with a slight shrug, turning indoors.

CHAPTER VI

MASTER DRISCOLL was unusually silent on the way home. He mounted the cross-roads hill without stopping to admire the view, though to-night there was some excuse for a rest. Hills had begun to tell on him. As a rule he stood and turned round in the middle, or, if it was a long hill, two or three times, and said "how beautiful." And this often when it was almost too dark to see the road. It was only when they reached the sharp rise near the top that he stood and looked towards the sea. Field and hedgerow shimmered. The thin line of breakers near Liscannow, and the sullen mountain behind the town shone with an illusive clearness. The brilliant, frosty moon threw a mysterious veil of brightness over everything.

"Jim Mescall thinks the old Ireland'll die with himself," he said gloomily.

"It won't. He's only an old croaker," Maurice said, with an abstracted air.

"God send," Driscoll said reverently.

They walked on in silence, one on each side of the road, deep in meditation. On any other night for the last ten months this conversational opening would have urged Maurice to the speech of vision and prophecy; but to-night he preferred to walk alone with his thoughts. For the most part they were hardly thoughts at all, only mere flashes of memory

—the turn of a cheek, the line of an eyebrow, and, dimly, how she held and carried herself. Their last words came back to him.

“Will you be long in these parts, Miss Barton?”

And the flash of her eyes as she said, her head turned slightly, “That depends, Mr. Blake. I’m tossed round like a ball from hand to hand. I’m lent to the Liscannow County Committee, and any agricultural society that asks for me can have me, I believe.”

The worst of it was, he thought, that one didn’t rightly know whether she wanted to be asked for or not. All the girls he had known hitherto would have said a thing out straight, or would have pretended in such a way that one could see through them easily. He was not quite satisfied with this generalization. Were Minnie Reardon and Miss Devoy and Hanny quite so simple? Few women in the old Irish stories were simple. They often looked one thing and seemed to think another, and then did something entirely unexpected. When he tried to test this by his own experience, he suddenly realized that, until to-night, he had never really observed a woman. Hanny, even, he did not know, much less Minnie Reardon. He could not remember the colour of their eyes, nor their dress. He had never dreamt of analysing what relation an intonation in the voice, a flash of the eye, bore to their words or thoughts. Then he jumped to the other extreme.

“There’s a great subtlety in women,” he said aloud.

“They’re queer enough,” Master Driscoll said vaguely, as if he was thinking of something else. After a pause he continued, “I don’t think myself

there's much in what Jim Mescall says. There ought to be no fear of the new things, banks and stores and the like, and Home Rule itself, destroying what's best in the old ways, if we only give 'em the proper graft."

"Of course not," Maurice said, somewhat impatiently.

This was his own favourite topic ; but now it threatened a train of thought that he had found pleasantly disturbing. He had a sudden illumination. There was a connection between Master Driscoll's thoughts and his own—at least they could be made to connect.

"We ought to have an egg and poultry society in Bourneen," he said emphatically.

Driscoll sighed. "We ought, indeed," he said. "I often thought of showing the people the way by putting up a fowl-run at the end of the garden. But I always shirked it, God forgive me, through not knowing much of the habits of hens and the like, except out of books."

He opened the cottage door as he finished speaking, lit the lamp, raked the ashes off the live turf in the grate, and put on a few sods.

"I think I'll sit up awhile," he said, taking a seat. "To-morrow—to-day, by the same token," glancing at the clock, "is a holiday, and I'll be time enough in the morning if I catch second mass."

He yawned and looked thoughtfully at the fire. "The hens are heavy on my mind," he said after a while. "It's too little is done for the labouring men, with all that's done for the farmers ; and that society'd be making some sort of a start for them."

Maurice told him of Miss Barton and the possibility of getting her as instructor.

"The very thing. It's God sent her into the parish," Driscoll said, striking his hand on his leg. "At the next meeting of the committee I'll move that we'll put in an application for her. A fine girl she is, with a laugh that made my own old heart jump. She's learning the Irish too, and knows more about the Red Branch than I do myself—we had a great seanachus by the fire, though she never let on to me what her business was."

"I think she'll do," Maurice said with judicial coldness, his nerves reacting to the excitement with which he awaited the old man's decision.

"Do!" Driscoll said indignantly. "What are ye young fellows coming to? God knows I ought to be tired of schools, but I'd begin all over again, from the alphabet, if I had the chance of learning from her. Go off to bed out of that! It's lumps of ice ye all have where your hearts ought to be."

He caught up the poker and shook it at Maurice, who gave a pleased laugh at the turf, which had now begun to flare.

The humorous gleam in Driscoll's eyes gave place to a thoughtful stare as he laid down the poker.

"I forgot that she's a Protestant," he said in a troubled tone.

Maurice at once fired up. "It doesn't make a pin's difference," he said excitedly. "The people are above that nonsense now." He stood up and kicked in a sod that was tumbling over the grate. "See what happened when an attempt was made to start the Erinites in the parish. My father himself, though he doesn't take much interest in politics since he bought the land, was against it. And you should hear Tom at the meeting! I was proud of him being my brother. 'The Crawfords and the

Levises and the Barbers,' he said, 'go to church on a Sunday, and we go to mass ; but apart from that there aren't better neighbours in the barony—the first to help at a threshing and a potato digging. Is it set up a friendly society ye would that'd shut the door on Emmet and Wolfe Tone and Mitchell and Parnell, not to mention the living ? Friendly !' he said, and I never saw such scorn on the face of a man before. ' We'll have no society in this parish that'd exclude our decent Protestant neighbours. We—— ' "

" Oh, I know they routed it," Driscoll interrupted. " The people are right enough in this parish. I wasn't thinking of them. 'Twas Father James I had in my mind."

" Oh, him ! " Maurice said more quietly, as if ashamed of his outburst. " Fortunately for her, she's not under the National Board. What has he to do with her ? "

" It'd be hard to bring religion into hens and ducks, that's true, though I wouldn't put it past him if he took the notion," Driscoll said, smiling again. " I suppose I'm still in dread of him, though I'm out of his hands itself. The way he used to tower over me when I had anything good to propose, shouting ' Remember I'm your manager and the priest of the parish ! I'll have none of it.' And often opposite the boys too," he added sadly. " It's a wonder they ever had any respect for me."

" It's not you they lost respect for," Maurice said bitterly.

" I had no right at all to be mentioning the like of that. Tut, tut ! I'm getting like any old maid with a cutting tongue," the old man said, standing up and lighting a candle. " There, take that now, and don't

be keeping it alight all night wearing out your eyes reading. And forget what I said about Father James—I've long since left him to God."

Maurice was soon in bed. He extinguished the candle, forgot all about Father Mahon, but he could not sleep. He shut his eyes, and saw Alice Barton in her toque, which seemed to bring some new beauty of her face into relief; he opened them, but she was still there, her big pleading eyes bent on Jack Hinnissey, who had refused even Mrs. Reardon to wind up the dance with his famous exhibition of hornpipes on a half-door. He heard again Jack Hinnissey's "Bedad, I'll do it to please you, miss." He took part, as vividly as when it happened, in taking down the half-door—"off the dairy, not the house, for that's only just been new painted," he again heard Mrs. Reardon say excitedly. And such hornpipes no one ever saw before in Bourneen! Alice's eyes glowed with excitement, and even Jim Mescall said, as he put down the fiddle, "I didn't think there was a man in these days that had it in him—and age creeping upon Jack Hinnissey too, and he the father of four." For a long time he heard only the rattle of the half-door on the stone floor and the quick stepping of agile feet, and, was it Jack Hinnissey's voice miles away? "Resin your elbow, Jim, and let the bow fly." Then there was only the old woman, the Ireland of the sad songs, sitting by a fireless hearth, her head bent on her knees. Soon a fire glowed, the bent shoulders straightened, the scant grey locks changed to a ruddy brown. She turned her face towards him, and he felt no surprise that the dream woman was Alice Barton. . . .

He awoke and laughed; it was absurd that she

should remind him of the dream woman, he said to himself. It seemed less absurd as he drew up the blinds in the kitchen and made the fire, noiselessly, lest he should awaken Driscoll in the room beyond. It seemed quite natural as he let himself out quietly to nine o'clock mass. Hair and eyes were alike in both ; this resemblance must have made him notice Alice at first. Afterwards, of course, she appealed to him because she was interested in Irish things, in the language, in old Irish dancing and folk songs, and because she worked for Ireland. . . .

He felt unaccountably jumpy as he walked the short distance to the chapel. He was greeted by several people on their way to mass, and always he responded nervously, expecting somehow that each voice would be hers. Not, he thought, that any one could mistake the somewhat harsh Bourneen brogue for her delightful accent which, while discarding the flatness of Bourneen and the pressure, as if through an overgrowth of adenoids, that characterized the speech of Dublin as he remembered it, retained all the music of both, and had an added beauty that was peculiarly its own.

Her voice would be a great asset : it would draw people to her lectures. There was no telling the influence for good it would have on all the progressive movements in the parish. He sat at the end of a bench in the cold chapel and congratulated himself on seeing her usefulness so clearly. He drew further inspiration from the shuffling and coughing all around, signs of impatient waiting for Father James, who was a little late ; from the frosted breaths of the worshippers, beginning in fantastic puffs and spirals and coalescing into a grey haze that enveloped the whole congregation ;

from the two tousled boys, only half awake, who lighted the reluctant candles on the altar. When, after much uncertain jabbing with the long tapers, the last candle was lighted, he had come to a decision to see her that very day, to give her timely notice that the parish would probably demand her services ; otherwise, and the thought arrested the visible breath he was exhaling at the moment and seemed to congeal it, she might make some other engagement and so be lost to the parish. It was his bounden duty, he felt, to do everything in his power to prevent the possibility of that calamity ; he must see her at once.

He joined in the relieved sigh with which the congregation greeted the appearance of Father James at the vestry door, the chalice, of necessity, held well in front of his commanding figure. He read his Prayer-book diligently during mass. By turning a page quickly, or by looking at the altar, he managed to brush away a disconcerting strand of gold brown hair or a laughing brown eye that occasionally came between him and the print. For one brief moment of distraction he reflected that, when he was not actually controlling his thoughts, it was not her usefulness which recalled her to him, but some little nuance of appearance, of speech, of gesture. He was elaborating a rational explanation of this when the server's bell reminded him of the mystery at the altar. He bowed his head. Gradually all sounds ceased. He forgot even the aggressive personality of Father Mahon, at whom he peered unconsciously through the slits between his fingers, in the deep hushed silence that filled the church. The feeling of peace that always came to him at the consecration of the mass had to-day some new wonder in it.

Even when the sounds began anew, snuffling and coughing and shuffling that had often worried him in the past, he hardly noticed them in the gladness and joy that filled him. The Pater Noster and the Communion had a fresh significance. The sunlight that broke through the tawdry glass in the east window as Father James was purifying the chalice seemed to sing to his heart.

As he resumed his seat to await the sermon he had a consciousness of life such as he felt only on rare occasions—when he heard the first birds twitter after dawn, or when he stood entranced and alone on the high pass behind Liscannow on a late summer afternoon, the mountains beyond clad in different shades of purple, and, at his feet, the shining track of the sun on the sea. He was tolerant of every one and of everything. He even smiled as Father Mahon jerked his chasuble over his head, flung it on the altar, turned round, faced the congregation with a fierce frown, pulled up the sleeves of his alb as if preparing for a prize fight, and shouted "Dearly beloved brethren."

His thoughts wandered again to his project of seeing Miss Barton during the day. He was worrying over the hour of his visit when a snigger from Jim Reardon, who sat in front of him, made him listen to the sermon.

"Hallow Eve dances, indeed! Looking for sweethearts in wells and tubs of water! Night walking and trapesing the parish under shawls in the dead of night. I'll put it down. I hope no Catholic house in this parish was disgraced by such a gathering last night—sowing the seed of the devil in its track. That's what learning Irish comes to, a language that's no use to man or mortal—an excuse

for sweethearting and sin. Revive old customs, indeed ! Every one of 'em sprung from the devil himself. For what were the heathen pagans that invented them but children of the devil ! Fathers and mothers of families, take heed of what I say, and keep your children from these dance houses of sin and infamy. They'll be choosing wives and husbands for themselves next, and you know what that means ! maybe bringing a penniless girl in on the floor to you. Love, indeed ! I never knew any good to come of it but sin and harm and unsuitable marriages. Young men and young women, the only lucky marriages are the marriages made for you by your parents and your friends with the full blessing of the priest of the parish."

Father James worked himself up to a high pitch of excitement. He frothed at the mouth, relapsed into the broadest brogue, and wound up with a vivid picture of the hell that awaited those who refused to be said by their priests ; describing in detail the torments of a sinful soul gripping frantically with lacerated fingers at the molten metal of a sloping lead roof in a fruitless effort to save himself from slipping into a pit of brimstone beneath.

Use had dulled Maurice to the description of these horrors, the invariable peroration of every sermon. He had even listened to denunciations of dances and of love in previous sermons without having been particularly moved. But to-day he burned with indignation. It was infamous to speak like that of the girls who were at the dance last night. . . . He caught sight of Miss Devoy in the women's side of the nave. Arranged marriages, indeed ! he thought angrily. Not that foolish talk

ought to trouble him. He had no time to think of marriage, and no desire . . .

He tried to escape the group of talkers in front of the chapel after mass. His mother ran after him and caught his arm.

"You might drop in after dinner if you can at all," she said.

"I'm very busy, but I'll try," he said moodily.

"Bedad, master," Jack Hinnissey said from another group, "he flailed all round him to-day."

"I'm that used to the geography of hell that I could find my way blindfolded in it after that," Larry Reardon said.

"The best chance you have, if you've the misfortune to go there, is to sit still, I'm told," Mike Blake said, lighting his pipe. "If you try to hop out of one torment, you're sure to hop into a worse. Not but there was a good deal of sense in what he said about marriages."

"There wasn't sense, nor rhyme, nor reason in it," Tom Blake said bluntly.

Mike was gesticulating violently with his pipe in preparation for a spirited reply, when a tactful neighbour interposed.

"How many tons of spuds did you draw off that lea land you ploughed, Mike?"

Mike's face assumed a look of worried calculation.

Mrs. Blake sighed. "It'll be all hours of the day before we get our breakfast if Mike once gets rightly started on that lea field," she said fretfully. Drawing Maurice aside she whispered: "You won't forget to drop in, agra. I have something in my eye for you."

Father Mahon passed out with long strides, his soutane swishing against his legs. The women

curtseyed. The men took off their hats and stood bareheaded, their pipes held discreetly behind their backs. The priest gave a few jerky nods.

"He's pleased enough with the lambasting he gave us," Jack Hinnissey said.

"Exercising himself for his breakfast he was. He might as well try and stop the tide beating against the Liscannow cliffs beyond as to try to hinder what's going on in the country now," Tom Blake said angrily.

"Whist, Tom," Mike said, leaving a sentence about potatoes unfinished. "Young fellows have long tongues and little sense."

"They don't be chewing the truth in their jaws, anyway, afraid to utter it."

Mike pretended not to hear Tom's retort, and resumed his dissertation on potatoes.

"Bedad, you had him there, Tom," Jack Hinnissey said, admiringly. "Besides, sure Father James isn't the Pope himself, that puts the kybosh on a thing the moment he speaks the word, I'm told. For the matter of that, there's things I could teach him myself. I wouldn't give ten pounds for the spavined colt he gave thirty for the other day. And his opinion on a bullock, with all he has of 'em, isn't worth that——" spitting on the ground. "And the whole world knows the curate is agin him in most of what he said to-day. Barring that I hadn't the right of the clergy to throw hell in your faces, I often made a more sensible speech myself in the Land League days."

"Faith, then, you did."

"'Tis your tongue is well oiled still, Jack."

"The day is long yet. Go on, Jack."

Maurice withdrew from the small crowd of

admiring listeners that was circling round Hinnissey. His mother again pressed his arm and said, "Don't forget." At the gate of the chapel yard he almost ran into Miss Devoy.

"I'm waiting for your mother," she said timidly.

He flushed. She went on speaking, but he didn't hear what she said. He seemed to see her for the first time. The high colour on her cheek-bones had become a dark blue purple. A light blue bow in the front of her ungainly hat made her cheeks livid. She tapped the ground with her umbrella, held nervously in hands covered with white cotton gloves several sizes too large. Streaks of purple wrist appeared between the gloves and the short sleeves of her serge coat. Her thick lips and grey eyes gave a hint of humour when she smiled, and she was smiling broadly now.

So this was the girl people were saying that he should marry, he thought. He looked at her eyes again and liked them. They were kind eyes and it did not matter that the lashes were few and straight and short. A feeling of friendliness for her came over him. She looked so forlorn and cold and ugly in spite of her good-humoured lips and eyes. He pitied her and reproached himself for not being kinder to her in the school. She was just the sort of girl Miss Barton could help . . .

He noticed that she had stopped speaking.

"I thought you always went to mass at the Strand chapel," he said, after groping round for something to say.

"Sure that's what I was telling you. I came here on account of your mother asking me to spend the day."

He laughed boyishly. She laughed too. The spirit died out of his laugh as he watched and heard her. Her crinkled eyes, half shrewd, half humorous, seemed to share some secret with him, and her laugh had an understanding ring. He had begun to laugh at a sudden recognition of what struck him as a grotesque attempt of his mother at match-making. But Miss Devoy's laugh made a cold shudder run down his back. Did she know his mother's plans? Surely his mother hadn't spoken to her? The whole idea was absurd. He wrinkled his brows in a search for resonant condemnatory adjectives—ridiculous, preposterous, impossible. He laughed again a little shrilly.

"Father James got out the wrong side of the bed to-day," she said pleasantly.

He didn't wish to discuss Father James with her, and was relieved to see his mother approach—a relief, however, that lasted only till she spoke.

"That's right—having a little chat," she said amicably.

He gave a wry smile, made a muttered excuse of having to get the master's breakfast, and hurried away. For a few paces he was angry with his mother. He should have to put a stop to her nonsense: he wouldn't go home that afternoon, he resolved with a frown. The sight of Master Driscoll standing bareheaded at the open door of the cottage, the sun glinting from his white locks, made him smile—a smile at his own foolishness.

"Seeing that I've no notion of getting married, I'm only bothering over nothing," he said to himself, with a shrug.

"You stole a march on me this morning," the old man said; "but I've stolen another on you,"

pointing to the table which was laid for breakfast. "I put on the eggs the minute I caught sight of you. They'll be done before you're rightly sitting down.

"Was it hell, or the Sea of Galilee, or the dignity of the priesthood, or Purgatory, or the dues, he gave you to-day? He used to have another sermon on Faith, but I haven't heard it for the last dozen years—I suppose it has slipped his memory," Driscoll continued, as he lifted a small pot off the fire and ladled four eggs into a saucer with an iron spoon.

"He gave us hell all round," Maurice said laughing.

"I always slept less under it than under the others. Itself and the one on the dues are the only two sermons that rouse him to the pitch of keeping me awake. He'll be after the mass offerings to-morrow, so we'll have Purgatory. Not but it's fitting enough for All Souls' Day if only he didn't sound the drum so loud for the money," Driscoll said, taking his seat and breaking the top of an egg with much care. "He'll soon have it as brimstony as hell itself if he goes on trimming it up with any more torments, to soften the heart into an extra five shillings towards the relief of the poor souls. May God forgive me for making light of their sufferings."

At his second cup of tea he said: "I was awake half the night thinking of that girl up at the Crawfords. We must get her at any cost."

The hand with which Maurice was holding his cup to his lips shook and some of the tea was spilled on his waiscoat.

"Bother it," he said nervously.

"If there's any fault I see in you, Maurice," the old man said, leaning back in his chair, "it is that you don't give credit enough to women for the power of good they're able to do if their mind is set on it. You're not half so eager to get that girl to help us as you ought to be."

Maurice said doubtfully, "Maybe I'm not."

CHAPTER VII

WHEN Driscoll left for second mass, Maurice settled down with a pipe to the bank accounts. More than the creamery or the agricultural society, the little parish bank interested him. More even than the Bourneen branch of the United Irish League, in whose proceedings he had a deep concern, partly since, under the rules of the Education Board, politics were a forbidden pleasure, partly because he had notions on politics that he had a hankering to submit to practical tests. But the bank was his own pet child. Bourneen was a comparatively rich parish of tillage land, pasture and grazing. The majority of the farms ranged from twenty acres to fifty ; a few were close on a hundred acres ; mixed land for the most part, good, middling, and poor, but capable of yielding a comfortable subsistence. Along the bog, however, on the east of the parish, and stretching up a spur of Slieve Mor, were many small holdings of reclaimed bog and mountain on which life was a constant struggle. And, by the sea, twenty or thirty families depended, half on miserable strips of bottom, half on precarious fishing in small boats on an unsafe shore. The Land Purchase Act had done something to better the condition of all the farmers, but it had done least for the poorer, and nothing at all for a score of landless labourers. When, through Master Driscoll's efforts, several

co-operative societies were started Maurice feared for awhile that the hoary principle, "to those that have more shall be given," would mark their work. But gradually their influence extended to the cotter on the edge of the bog, to the labourer's patch of garden, to the fisherman's boat.

Driscoll had said at a committee meeting, "We've a long road to go yet, but we're making a real beginning at last. What Maurice Blake has done with that bank, since he became secretary near a year ago, is beyond telling."

"Isn't he your own rearing, if he did itself? Not but the whole world knows he has a head on him," was Jack Hinnissey's comment.

The items in the books that gave a pleasant flavour to Maurice's pipe, and caused him to give low chuckles of satisfaction, might have provoked a regular banker to a cynical smile. Twenty-five shillings to Mike Fahey to buy a sow bonham—paid back in full later, on selling a litter of seven pigs; six pounds advanced on the date of repayment to buy a yearling heifer. Two pounds to Jimmy Delaney for basic slag—to be paid when the crop was reaped. Twelve pounds to four Strand fishermen towards the purchase of a Greencastle yawl; four pounds paid back "after the big haul of herrings on the 4th August."

The arrival of Bessy Reilly, to clean up, interrupted him. He refilled his pipe and walked bareheaded in the small garden in front. All signs of frost had gone, except a few blackened sprigs of heliotrope and some faded calceolarias. The chrysanthemum blooms along the wall of the cottage opened wide to the sun; the canvas which protected them from the frost having been rolled up neatly by

Master Driscoll before going to mass. Maurice gazed long at the flowers, but thought of a poultry society. Soon there would be entries in the bank books of Buff Orpingtons and Indian Runner ducks. His thoughts wandered to Alice Barton. If she came to help in the parish, things must be made as pleasant as possible for her. A young girl like her needed play as well as work. It wasn't much the country had to offer, he said to himself with a frown. But it was waking up. There was dancing at the Irish class, and the singing of folk songs. They must have more gatherings in the houses at night. Jim Mescall must be induced to spend more time in the parish. . . .

Afterwards he sat in his own room making a fair copy of some old tales that he hoped one day to see in print. He had taken them down in small note-books from the lips of old story tellers at ceilidhs ; or Driscoll had dictated them as they sat together at night. He read his own English translation of one about the holy well near Reardon's, a fantastic story with laughter and tears as closely blended as warp and woof in a web of linen. How she would smile over it and look sad. . . .

"Are you asleep?" Driscoll said, opening the door. "Bessy shouted to you before she went, and I've called out twice myself. The bacon and cabbage'll be cold."

"I'm afraid I was," Maurice said, looking wryly at the few lines he had copied in as many hours.

"If only Father Malone had the ruling of the parish, I wouldn't exchange out of it for heaven itself," Driscoll said, as he carved the small joint of bacon in its bed of white cabbage.

"He's a fine man every way," Maurice said enthusiastically. "Did he give a good sermon?"

"He did then. One that'd put the heart in a man, no matter how he was broken down by misfortune. And it wasn't by lying under it neither, his advice was, but by putting on a bold front to it."

Maurice let the conversation drop and ate his frugal dinner hurriedly. He pushed back his chair as he laid down his knife and fork, and said—

"I think I'll step up to the Crawfords' and see that girl—as you're so set on it."

He added the last sentence hesitatingly, after a pause. He had no sooner said it than he corrected it, blushing as if ashamed of a mis-statement. "I was thinking of going myself, in any case."

"That's right. But if you're too busy I'd strive a point and go myself, after I get rid of the men that are coming about the new shed in the store yard beyond."

"I'm quite free—nothing at all to do," Maurice said emphatically, taking his hat off a peg.

"It's all one which of us goes," Driscoll said heartily.

Maurice's reply to this was to make quickly for the door. It struck him on the doorstep to take the story about the well and read it to her; but after a moment's hesitation he decided not to take it. A few of the chrysanthemums? He shook his head. As he walked rapidly through the village he had misgivings as to the wisdom of going at all. A letter would have done as well. It would be better if Master Driscoll had gone. There was no necessity for any one to write to her or see her—a letter to

the County Committee would have settled everything. He did not, however, slacken his pace. He glanced sideways at his shadow, lengthened by the low westering sun. He looked at his watch. It was still early. Was it too early to call at the Crawfords' ? The afternoon of a Sunday or holiday was all right for a visit to a Catholic house. But the Crawfords were Protestants. As this was no holiday with them, they were probably working. And on working days the fittest time for visiting was in the evening after supper. As he approached his father's house he decided to go in there and put off the visit to Crawfords' till later. He thought of Miss Devoy. She was with his mother. He began to hum "The Snowy-breasted Pearl," and walked steadily past the gate.

At the entrance to the boreen leading to Crawford's house he came on John Crawford, his hands in his pockets, gazing over the low hedge at a field in which a few drills of potatoes were still undug. His bearded, taciturn face was set gloomily.

"More frost ?" he said, looking up at the sky.

"I think not," Maurice said gravely, after inspecting the signs.

Crawford took a long look at the sun and nodded twice in agreement.

"Maybe they're safe then. Last night's frost was only skin deep. Are you going up to the house ?"

"I am. Is Miss Barton in ?"

"She is."

They walked in silence along the well-kept boreen. A waste of time and labour and money,

some of Crawford's neighbours called his efforts to keep the boreen in repair. He usually muttered into his beard something about "saving in horses' legs and cart wheels." His clipped hedges were excused with knowing nods and a reference to "the Scotch blood that was far back in him"; explanation enough apparently of all queer fads. He was often counselled, more in former years than recently, not "to waste such a terrible wicked lot of money on the land in bag manure and the like." Master Driscoll attributed his good crops to good farming; but it was generally accepted that "them Protestants have the devil's luck."

"It's a powerful lot of holidays ye have," he said, half-way up the boreen.

"Not near so many as there used to be," Maurice said smiling.

"Ye might clip another couple without any loss," Crawford said, deftly kicking a loose stone off the road with his right foot behind his left.

Yet he paid a subtle deference to Catholic holidays. He wore his week-day clothes but he always put on a coat, an unusual feature in his working attire. He never did any work "in face of the public," and confined his labours to the garden or the fields behind the house.

"You'll find her within likely," he said, pushing open the door.

He sauntered away when he had discharged his office of hospitality.

Mrs. Crawford, who was pouring water from a kettle into a teapot at the hearth, suspended the operation and turned her head.

"If it's not Maurice Blake!" she said, laying down the kettle and wiping her hands on her apron.

"A thousand welcomes to you, Maurice." She shook hands warmly.

Alice Barton, seated on a three-legged stool by the fire, nodded to him brightly. She was vigorously whipping cream in a bowl with a spoon, one of Mrs. Crawford's largest aprons tied high on her waist.

"Is it near broke yet?" Mrs. Crawford asked.

"It is not—though my arm is—almost," Alice said jerkily.

"The worst of that creamery is that we're often without a bit of butter in the house," Mrs. Crawford said, turning to Maurice. "We were just going to have a cup of tea and a mouthful of hot cake—and what'd that be without the butter to slip it down?—when I found all of a sudden there wasn't a taste in the place. So we're making shift to make a bit in a bowl. Hold it well over the fire, Alice, so that it'll get a touch of the heat."

"And the face nearly burned off me already," Alice said, turning her back to the fire.

Maurice thought the pink glow in her cheeks very becoming, and was tempted to say so. But he was tongue tied, and Mrs. Crawford anticipated him.

"A fat lot of harm it has done you," she said, as she filled the teapot. "Here, give me that bowl and I'll soon have the butter swimming on the top of it. And now that the master has come you might put a cloth on the table in the room and lay the tea-things there," she added, as Alice, with a sigh of relief, handed her the bowl.

Alice took off the apron, which had enveloped her like a sack, glanced doubtfully at the dresser and at her aunt.

"Oh ! the best cups in the room cupboard, of course," Mrs. Crawford said.

She watched Alice admiringly as she walked across the kitchen to the room door, and whispered to Maurice—

"She's that smart and handy she might have been reared in the country."

Though Maurice at the moment was attributing her grace of movement to some unknown town influence, he nodded emphatic agreement.

Mrs. Crawford whipped the cream with an easy certainty. Alice moved about the room, coming a few times to the dresser in the kitchen for a knife or a plate. Maurice watched her. She had changed somehow since last night. He smiled with pleasure. It was ridiculous of Hanny to say that a girl's new blouse would be staring him in the face for a year before he'd notice it, and not even then unless he was told about it. Why, he had noticed Miss Barton's dress twice in twenty-four hours : he noticed even the difference in her shoes, he asserted strongly, in proof of his acute power of observation. Of course, it was because she was wearing a blouse and skirt now that she looked different.

"There, it's broke at last," Mrs. Crawford said with satisfaction. "I'll have it gathered together in a minute. The tea is more than drawn enough for Alice. She has queer city notions about tea, but sure she can add a drop of water to it if it's too strong. We won't wait for John," she continued, as she collected the butter into a small lump, poured off the buttermilk, washed the butter, walking the while between the table and the dresser. "If he's working he likes a cup taken to him in the field. If he's only pottering about the place, either he comes

in or he doesn't. If he chances in while the tea is going he enjoys a cup as well as another. If he doesn't come in, sorra one of me looks for him, and he never feels the want of it."

"Where is Allan?" Maurice asked, to fill up a pause.

"Allan! he's worse than a Catholic for all the good we get out of that son of ours on a holiday. Galivanting he is into Liscannow to a Gaelic football match—in his Sunday clothes too. Come along in now and we'll have a cup of tea," she added, leading the way to the room, the teapot in one hand and a plate of butter in the other.

A small fire burned in the grate. "That's for Alice," Mrs. Crawford said, nodding at the fire with some pride. "She has a powerful deal of reading and writing to do in that job of hers. With all the comings in and going out in the kitchen her head'd be moidered, so I keep a few sods in here for her."

This reminded Maurice of the object of his visit, but it was not till he had almost finished tea that he mustered courage to say—

"Mr. Driscoll wishes to know if you'd like to come to Bourneen to lecture, Miss Barton? He says the society is going to ask for you at once."

He spoke nervously, in a hushed voice, as if the fate of empires depended on her reply. Her eyes sparkled mischievously.

"There now?" she said, tossing her head, to Mrs. Crawford, whose mouth hung open in astonishment.

"Think of that now," Mrs. Crawford said weakly.

Alice turned to Maurice with a set face. There

was a prim severity about her lips, but her eyes sparkled a little as she said—

“I’ve to go where I’m sent—of course, I’ve no objection to come here.”

“Listen to her putting on now !” Mrs. Crawford said derisively. “And she near on her knees to John all the morning coaxing him to try and get her asked.”

“Oh ! Aunt Ruth,” Alice said appealingly, all her primness gone.

“Far be it from me to belittle you,” her aunt said, looking at her affectionately. “I wouldn’t give in to any one in the ten parishes on your laying of a table or settling a posy of flowers. And you should see the wonders she worked, Maurice, on my Sunday dress in the course of a few minutes. I’m never tired of singing her praises. But,” she screwed her face doubtfully, “it’s a different matter entirely when it comes to the rearing of fowl. There’s myself now, and I all my life at it, and didn’t I lose eleven young turkeys out of a score this very year. There John sat,” she pointed to the kitchen, “and she begging of him, and his eyes fixed on the back of next year and as dumb as a post, and never word of encouragement he’d breathe on her. He’s a silent man and it’s hard to know what he notices. From the way he sat her on his knee the night she came, I doubt if he sees that she’s out of the long-clothes she used to wear and he dandling her when he saw her last, near twenty years ago. Though I believe in my heart he didn’t give any heed to her because of a crazy notion he has against pushing relations on the county pay-sheet. But it puts a different face on it if Master Driscoll thinks well of her knowledge. What he doesn’t

know about one thing and another isn't worth knowing. Maybe, I wasn't giving her enough of credit myself," she wound up, her voice trailing off in a questioning tone.

Maurice listened uneasily. His eyes wandered from the framed scripture texts on the walls to the clasped family Bible, on its mat of blue and red Berlin wool, on a small table in the corner. He had strong opinions on qualifications and had always opposed foisting people into jobs. What did he or Master Driscoll know about her? His eyes fell on her photograph on the mantelpiece. The very dress she wore last night at Reardons'! With a faith that transcends all knowledge, he felt convinced that she was capable. If weaker people needed evidence, there it was in the picture, in the poise of her head, in the line of her neck and shoulders. He was even a little disappointed when he remembered why he had taken her knowledge for granted—the Board that appointed to her post enforced the strictest tests of fitness. His eyes caught hers fixed on him quizzically.

"What do you think of me?" said they.

He intended his to answer, "I believe you are well qualified," and was disturbed when she turned away her eyes hastily, blushed the faintest pink up to the edge of her hair and frowned.

When he said the same words aloud to Mrs. Crawford a moment afterwards, Alice smiled normally and gave him a grateful little nod. Then she shrugged her shoulders, saying—

"A girl's relatives never believe that she can do anything."

Mrs. Crawford threw up her hands. "Did any one ever hear the like?" she said to the ceiling.

"Why if you only heard all I say to John about you, and I lying awake at night. 'Whist, woman,' he'd say, 'you're keeping the sleep off me.' But he might just as well be speaking to the wall. All along I knew you had it in you——"

"Ruth," Crawford interrupted through the window, having lifted the sash from outside, "would you hand out an old apron to save Dempsey's Sunday trousers, and he milking?"

"You ruffian of the world," she said, on going to the window, to the workman who stood beside her husband. "And you not coming next or nigh the place since you went off early to second mass."

"And would you blame me, ma'am, and I having my clean things on me?" Dempsey said, laughing sheepishly. "The last time I went to confession to Father James, he drew the line of work on a Holiday at milking cows or the like that couldn't go without. And to be all the more careful, he said, because I'm a labouring man to Protestants, to keep up the credit of my religion, and on no account to change out of my Sunday trousers or my greased shoes—though the last wouldn't matter a ha'penny, for they're the same Sunday and day,—for fear I might be forgetting the holy day that was in it and be putting my hand to other servile works that there was no allowance of."

Mrs. Crawford sniffed. "It's a pity he didn't put a padlock on your tongue. As for work! if you confessed all you done of it from one week's end to the other, and every day was a holiday, he'd be hard set to make a sin out of it."

She brought an apron from the kitchen and handed it to Dempsey through the window.

"The teapot isn't cold yet, come in and have

a cup, John, and I have the news of the world for you, too," she said in a wheedling tone to her husband.

He grunted but walked towards the kitchen door.

"If I had a cup myself it would put the heart in me for the milking," Dempsey said, as she was about to let down the sash.

"You idle stravager," she said, pulling it down and jerking it up again. She filled a cup, buttered a huge slice of soda cake and handed them out. "Be off out of my sight with you—and I'll be out in a minute to help you with the milking," she added, banging the sash to.

Crawford came in and stood behind Alice's chair.

"I'll have no tea now. I must see after the cows," he said gloomily. "What is it?"

"There are others that think higher of your own than you do," Mrs. Crawford said scornfully, her hands on her hips. "The master there brought the news. Master Driscoll is head and front of a move to get Alice to work in the parish."

Crawford was fingering a strand of Alice's hair between his thumb and first finger.

"You'll be coming back to us for a bit again, then," he said.

She turned her head, and pressed her cheek against his hand.

"I must go and look after the milk," he said.

Alice walked with him to the kitchen door.

"It was always a grievance to him that he never had a daughter of his own," Mrs. Crawford said to Maurice in a low voice. "Sorra a word he ever gives Alice more than that. But she won't have a word said against him. It might be blood speaking in her and she his own sister's daughter. They can

sit there of a night, the best of company, without a word between them, and the next minute she'd be as lively as a cricket with myself. If she doesn't know about the fowl itself she has the heart in her to comfort a lonely man. But there, I'm talking, and I ought to be helping Dempsey. We're all beholden to you for taking the trouble to come with the news."

Alice sat with Maurice by the fire in the kitchen while Mrs. Crawford was in the cowhouse. She showed him her certificates, spoke of her early life at home, of the little poultry run her mother kept beyond Drumcondra, on the outskirts of Dublin, "as much to keep her in mind of the country as for the profit of it." The light went from the day, but she spoke on, the firelight gilding her hair, her eyes shining, of her mother's love of the country, a love compared with which her own was only a shadow; of the tales of Ireland her mother told her; of the Irish class she attended in a back room in Eccles Street; of her excitement on the great day when it struck her that her knowledge of poultry might be made a means of living in the real country which she hardly dared to believe had all the charm her mother ascribed to it; of her preparation at the agricultural college; of her appointment; and since—but here words failed her, and he saw her eyes shine brighter for the tears that dimmed them.

It was late when he went home. He had only a vague memory of what she said, but as he walked along the familiar road he saw her clearly as she sat at the fireside, her head slightly bent forward, her chin resting on her hand, her hair a golden aura. He heard again her low impassioned voice with a new music in it at that pitch. He shivered a little

—she seemed so far away, so detached. He ought to be glad, he said to himself reproachfully, that she was so bound up in her ideals. They were his own too. He even said aloud as he passed the old mill : “ It’s a happy country that has the heart of a woman like her.” But he felt restless and unhappy. In passing through the village he recalled the gesture of her face seeking John Crawford’s hand ; and, somehow, it brought him peace.

CHAPTER VIII

SPRING had come to Bourneen. Trees in bud shone pink in the sunlight. Delicate green shoots starred the hedgerows. The cold grey dawns had become pearl, and the mill hill again glowed red at sunrise. The snowdrops in Master Driscoll's garden had lost their flowers. The first bloom of the purple crocuses had already gone, and a row of daffodils unfolded golden crowns to the sun. Farmers went early afield and grudged a morning for the Easter stations, which were in full swing. Freshly turned earth scented the morning air, though the last of the second ploughing was nearly done. Wheat peeped above the ground. Oats had been sown. In the barns women deftly cut potato setts and laid them in skibs ready for planting. In the paddocks lambs frisked about their mothers or nibbled shyly at the young grass.

Maurice Blake lingered on his way to the school-house. He read a placard, displayed outside the agricultural store, announcing lectures and demonstrations in poultry keeping by Miss Alice Barton. It looked well and read well, he thought.

"I hope she won't disappoint this time," the serjeant of police said, coming to a stand behind Maurice, after a leisurely saunter through the village street.

“Good morning, serjeant. Oh, she didn’t disappoint. ’Twas the County Committee’s fault. They gave in to the Drumquin people, who didn’t want to give her up. She’s coming for certain in a fortnight.”

“She’s a great hand at it, I believe. The patrol have posted her up well all over the parish. I thought they might as well be at that as doing nothing. Not a boycotted man in the place, or a grass farm itself to be protecting. And Father Malone leaves little for the men to do in the way of minding pubs. Only for an odd pig or a cow straying round the roads, they’d be hard set to make any showing for their pay.”

Maurice dangled the keys which he held in his hand.

The serjeant looked at them doubtfully. “There’s many ways of making a living,” he said, shaking his head, “but I wouldn’t be shut up in a school on a spring day like this—not if I had the offer of being made a head constable for it. There—if that isn’t that racer of a sow of Clancy’s! My own job isn’t all sugarstick, I can tell you. A man can’t take a stroll after breakfast without all the pigs of the country forcing themselves under his notice. I must go back to the barracks and send out a couple of men to take her in charge.”

At the school gate Maurice stopped to talk to the two boys who had come early to dust the school-room which they had swept out the afternoon before. With touzled hair and flushed faces, fresh from a game of leap-frog, they greeted him sheepishly. Tommy Hinnissey, with an ear for the notes of a bird hopping about in a flower-bed, and an eye for the green in the hedge, said—

"There was a robineen peering about a bush in the end of our garden this morning—the same bush that there was a robineen's nest in last year. I doubt but she was the same bird, and maybe she's thinking of nesting there again. Sorra one of us touched an egg in it, so she might. In another couple of weeks there'll be nests high and low all over the parish."

Pierce Donlon said contemptuously, "There were four nests in our garden last year."

"Shall we light a fire this morning?" Maurice asked doubtfully.

"Is it on a morning like this?" Tommy said, sniffing the air. "It'd be a great day for belting across the high bank through the middle of the bog barefooted," he added, with a sigh.

"It might be only a pet day," Pierce said gloomily.

"And my father saying this morning the spring had come in earnest! Why, it's nearly too fine for spinning a top, and a man could play marbles any day," Tommy said, taking the school door-key from Maurice, with a triumphant look at Donlon.

Maurice felt, as he watched them enter the school, that he, too, would like to be on the bog path, and go on and on, up the spur of the mountain, to the very top of Slieve Mor, which still wore a ragged cap of snow. He took off his hat, opened his lips wide, and drank in draughts of the fresh air that fanned his temples like a caressing hand. It seemed to quicken his blood. There was something in what the serjeant said about school—especially on a day like this. He sighed, and sighed again more deeply as he saw Miss Devoy approach the gate. He stooped and picked some weeds out of a

bed, turned his back to the path and fingered the creeper on the school wall, the scarlet buds full to bursting.

"I am hot," she said in a panting voice, "and my winter jacket on me too. I was afraid to leave it off. As I'm early, you might hear my Irish lesson before school begins."

"I'll be in after you in a minute—when I fix this creeper."

"Can't I help you?" she said cheerfully.

Spring was kind to her. All the blue-black and nearly all the purple had left her cheek-bones, which were flushed a deep red. Drops of sweat stood out on her forehead and on her upper lip. He watched anxiously a little stream trickle down by the corner of her eye.

"I am hot," she said again, mopping her face with a blue and white speckled handkerchief.

"I've just finished," he said, picking a promising bud.

For the hundredth time, as he followed her into the schoolroom, he regretted Joan Bradley, the elderly workmistress whose place Miss Devoy had taken. Old Joan wasn't much help, but she didn't get on his nerves. She could talk Irish too, but—he frowned, then laughed as he caught sight of the Young Ladies' Journal sticking out of Miss Devoy's pocket. And he had been so pleased, he thought ruefully, when Miss Devoy first asked him to teach her Irish. He remembered the day well, the day following the All Saints' Day she spent with his mother. He had expected an attack for not having kept his promise; but all Miss Devoy had said was, "You missed a great deal by not being there. Myself and your mother had a great crack."

Later she had said, "I'm thinking of learning the Irish myself—if you could spare the time to teach me." After a week her interest flagged, and she had not yet got through the first primer of O'Growney. He had begun to loathe the lesson and hoped every day that she would forget about it. But she never forgot. It was only when the books were opened for the lesson that she said—

"I had a headache last night, and couldn't read a word ;" or "I'm blest if I didn't forget all about it." And in the next breath asked him if he had read the Young Ladies' Journal for last month. "That Lady Ermyntre de Vere is a clip, she is," and she plunged into the heroine's exciting adventures. He reduced the time of the lesson from twenty minutes to ten. One day, when she said "The Irish is a great chance for a chat," he almost lost his temper ; but the sight of her beaming, good-natured face restrained him.

To-day she had looked over the lesson. But at the end of five minutes she shut the book.

"That's the last word I did," she said with a smile. "But I'll know it better to-morrow. I see by the posters that that niece of the Crawfords' is coming here."

"She is."

"I never could see much in her. She has no colour in the face," Miss Devoy said, with a critical air, spreading her arms on the table in preparation for a talk.

Maurice flushed and pulled out his watch. "That clock is slow. We must begin," he said sharply, gathering up his books. "Will you please take the catechism class, Miss Devoy ?"

"Always when I'm sitting comfortable, I must

be up and begin something or other," she said, yawning.

The benches on both sides of the gangway were fairly full, boys on one side, girls on the other, and there was still a steady stream through the door. Half the boys were barefooted, fewer of the girls. Satchels and straps of books were put away noisily in the ledges under the desks. There was a low hum of conversation.

Notwithstanding his remark about the time, Maurice stood, watch in hand, in front of his desk till the clock struck the half-hour. He then reversed a card, marked "Secular Instruction," and it read "Religious Instruction." Half a dozen children stood up and left the room—Protestant Levises and Barbers. The seventy Catholics watched them enviously. "The Prods" were to have half an hour's play, while the unhappy majority remaining behind to con the Maynooth Catechism felt all the desolation of martyrdom. No one stirred till the last little Barber girl took a flying jump through the porch door. There was a general sigh. The children in the benches filed out and formed themselves into semi-circular classes at the top and side of the school-room. There was much shuffling of feet in the effort to toe exactly the white chalk circles on the floor.

Maurice spoke sharply to a late comer. She said reproachfully, "I had to drive the cows to the field by the bog." It was only then he realized that she was an overworked girl for whom he always had deep sympathy. He felt unaccountably out of temper, and was annoyed with himself. Miss Devoy had said something that vexed him. . . . Children, however, always put him in good humour.

Both Miss Devoy and Miss Barton were soon forgotten. No one could resist the pleading eyes of a mite of six who insisted strenuously that Christ was born on Christmas Day in a stable at Bermingham's—the local blacksmith. And a small boy, after diligent thought, gave an individual view of Christian charity. When asked what he would do for the wounded man by the roadside if he passed by in place of the good Samaritan: "I'd croost him with stones," said he. When Maurice tried to temper this truculence the boy was only doubtfully convinced.

At ten o'clock secular school began. A class went off joyfully to Master Driscoll's garden. While Miss Devoy gave a writing lesson in the desks, Maurice took a geography class in the playground. Instead of beginning with an outline map of the world his teaching began at the school door. The pupils knew nothing of Chimborazo or the probable sources of the Brahmaputra, but they knew all about Slieve Mor, and the Liscannow river, and the stream that once turned the mill at the foot of the hill on the Liscannow road—and would turn it again soon Maurice hoped.

All the pupils were in the schoolroom at ten minutes to eleven for roll-call. Master Driscoll's unconventional method of calling the roll still survived. Attendance was voluntary by law, but a too vigorous compulsion was often exercised by elder brothers.

"Charlie Hinnissey?" Maurice called.

"Absent," Tommy said, cheerfully. "By reason of a stone bruise on his big toe he got going home last night. He'll be here to-morrow if I have to bring him by the scruff of the neck."

"No harshness, mind," Maurice said.

"Sorra bit. He'll come free enough—with me behind him," Jimmy said righteously.

As Maurice was closing the report book there was a loud shout of "Hi, there!" from the road.

Miss Devoy, who was near a window, looked out.

"It's Father James in his trap coming back from the station," she said excitedly. "He's getting out and Matsey is off to the chapel with the station-box. He wants some one to hold the mare."

Maurice smiled drearily, and said abstractedly to a boy near the door, "Would you please hold the priest's horse?"

The infrequent visits of Father James depressed Maurice. He was always afraid that the all-powerful manager was at last about to prevent the teaching of some cherished subject. With some trepidation he walked towards the porch. He looked round to see if everything was in order. An unwonted hush had fallen on the room. Miss Devoy, in a corner, was flattening her already flat hair, in front of a small mirror attached to the back of a stiff cardboard copy of the Rules and Regulations of the National Board of Education.

"Why am I kept waiting like this?" Father James said at the door.

Maurice tried to keep a note of stiffness out of his voice as he said—

"No one saw you drive up, sir."

"Don't let it happen again. Sit down, sit down," to the pupils who stood in their places with eyes bent. "Hi, you! If a herring and a half cost three halfpence, how many for elevenpence? Right. What's the length of the Mississippi? Right." He paused before putting his third

favourite question, and a little girl began to spell h-i-p. "Spell hippopotamus. Right. I see your teachers are attending fairly to their work. Stick to the three R's and you'll get on in the world. There's a boy from the Strand school below that got to be a clerk in a shop in Liscannow, and he has just opened a shop of his own. That's something to keep before you to make you work."

He turned to Maurice. "Send up three or four of 'em to pick the weeds out of my front walk."

He drummed the rostrum nervously with his fingers and frowned. "The bishop is coming for confirmation at the end of the autumn. Let me see how they know their catechism," he said loudly.

Maurice whispered that it was against the rules, that religious instruction was over, that there were Protestants present.

"Turn them out," the priest said impatiently. "As if a manager can't do what he likes in his own school."

"The inspector?"

"I don't give that for an inspector," snapping his fingers. "Do as I tell you at once."

Maurice reluctantly changed the card to "Religious Instruction." The Levises and Barbers marched out, but those left behind dared not sigh.

"Who is the invisible head of the Church?"

"Jesus Christ," a small boy said glibly.

"And the visible head?"

"The Pope."

"And who represents Jesus Christ and the Pope in this parish?"

There was some hesitation over this. A little girl said, "Miss Devoy."

"What am I always telling you week in and week out off the altar?" the priest said furiously.

"To pay the dues, your reverence," a small boy said brightly.

Father James cuffed his ears. Another boy said—

"That you're the same as the Pope himself in Bourneen."

This seemed satisfactory, for the priest said, "That's enough for one bout. I'll come in soon and give you more instruction in your religion."

The "Secular Instruction" side of the card in front of the teacher's desk was again exposed and the Protestants were called in. Father James walked up and down restlessly. He went to the teacher's desk and opened the report book.

"How many am I to put down present?" he said.

"There are seventy-six, and the boy holding the mare," Maurice said quietly.

Father James looked at him suspiciously and marked seventy-seven. He put down the pen and looked round the room, caught Tommy Hinnissey's eye and beckoned to him.

"You're Hinnissey, aren't you?"

Tommy pulled his forelock and stammered, "Yes, sir—your reverence."

"Tell your father he hasn't given me a day's ploughing yet, and I'm behind-hand."

He watched Miss Devoy handing out copy-books, looked thoughtfully from her to Maurice, and said, "Hum, hum."

"I must be going," he said after a brown study of a few minutes. "I have my work to do."

Maurice, who was standing by idle, checked a

long breath of relief. On his way out, Father James said roughly to Miss Devoy—

“How are you?” with contemptuous emphasis on the “you.”

“Quite well, thank you, Father James,” she said, with a little bob, all the colour gone out of her cheeks except on the high bones, which were a streaky blue.

“You are, are you,” he said half to himself, as he turned moodily to the door.

When he had taken his seat in his trap he flicked the boy who held the horse with his whip, shouting, “Let go the mare’s head, can’t you”; and turning slightly towards Maurice, who stood by the gate, he said aggressively, “And you, come up to the parochial house this evening at five o’clock. I want a word with you.” Without waiting for a reply he drove off.

“I did my best,” the boy whimpered, rubbing his ear.

But Maurice was watching the bobbing of the priest’s silk hat as the trap rattled up the street at a brisk pace. As it disappeared out of sight round the bend, he had a dull feeling of resentment.

“Now that he’s gone, send me out another class. I’m waiting for ’em,” Driscoll said, leaning over the hedge that divided his garden from the school yard.

Maurice waved assent. He walked slowly up the path. Inside the school door Miss Devoy met him and whispered—

“I’m feeling myself again, now he’s gone. Though he’s my own blood itself, he makes the marrow run cold down my spine.”

He heard her vaguely. All the freshness seemed

to have gone out of the day. He opened the windows wider. It came as a shock to him that the sun was still shining, that it danced, through the gently waving branches of a tree in the playground, on the front of his desk. He pulled himself together, sent a class out to Master Driscoll, and took a class himself. But, while he made figures on the black-board and spoke to the children, he was thinking of Father Mahon. He handed the class over to a monitor and went out into the playground. He looked longingly at Slieve Mor, stood awhile watching the class gathered round Master Driscoll. The old man laughed, and there was a happy responsive laugh from the group of children. What's wrong with me to-day? Maurice asked himself; and the only answer he could give was to shrug his shoulders. Father Mahon had not treated him worse to-day than on previous visits. He was always rude. To-day he was less aggressive than usual. Only once, when he struck the boy with the whip, had he felt like hitting him. During other visits Maurice had to restrain himself half a dozen times in as many minutes. Master Driscoll had put up with the priest for years; but then Master Driscoll had the temper of a saint. With a sigh, as if this was something quite beyond him, Maurice went back to his work.

Father Mahon, however, troubled his thoughts all through the school hours. And at dinner in the afternoon he said abruptly to Driscoll—

“How did you put up with him so long?”

“Oh, the P.P.,” Driscoll said, after a moment's doubt as to whom Maurice referred. “I suppose I took him as a penance for my sins. You see, I had a good start under old Father Boland, a grand man that knew what real education was, and cared for it.

Father James neither knows nor cares. His only idea was to boss me and the children, and to make us fetch and carry for him."

The old man leaned back in his chair and regarded the ceiling attentively.

"It's a queer system that makes directors of education of men that don't care a pin about it, and only use it for their own ends," Maurice said moodily.

"It is then. But what can't be cured must be endured. The priests have the schools. Thank God there's many a good man among them. They're a mixed lot, God forgive me, like the contents of Tommy Hinnissey's breeches pockets—a top that spins true, and one with a crooked peg that'd drive you crazy; a glass tawe with the colours of the rainbow in it that's not much good except to look at; china tawes that might run straight and that mightn't, and a lot of common marbles with a few useful ones among 'em."

"I wouldn't mind if they weren't ruining the schools," Maurice said with a frown.

"That's where the shoe pinches you," Driscoll said with a smile. "Bide your time and you don't know what might happen. I had Father Boland, you see, and the man that'll follow Father James might take some interest in the schools. It's a queer make up of a world, and I'm always hoping for the best."

"Father Mahon might be here all his life," Maurice said hopelessly.

"God send they'll make a bishop of him, or give him some promotion."

"In the next shuffle we might get worse."

"There's some truth in that," Driscoll said

thoughtfully. "After all, Father James has his good points. I soon found out that his only idea of managing the school was to make a kind of servant of me, to stand at the chapel door for him and make collections, to copy letters and run messages, and let him act the tyrant over me in front of the school and the whole parish. It took some trampling of myself to stifle the pride that was in me. But once I did, what happened? He came into the school three or four times a year and stood on my neck for five minutes. The rest of the time I had it all to myself. He never knew what I was teaching. He signed papers without reading them. As long as the children were able to roll out the penny catechism like a lot of parrots at the confirmation examinations, he never gave any heed to what I was doing in the school. Except when he wanted me to help him in his own affairs, or wanted a boy to work in his garden, or to run into Liscannow on a message, or when he had an appointment to make, or some money to knock out of the Board for building and repairs, he never gave a thought to the school—thank God for that same. For it often came between me and my night's rest that some day he'd be messing about his real business as a manager, and then where would the school be?"

"Some day I'll throw an inkpot at his head, and he might then," Maurice said bitterly.

Driscoll held up his hands in horror. "And he having the power of life and death over you. And the good you're able to do on the blind side of him as long as there's peace."

"I haven't your patience, master," Maurice said, standing up and looking at the clock. "I wonder

what he wants me for this evening? It's nearly five—I must be off."

The old man stood up and put his hand on Maurice's shoulder. "Cool yourself in the walk up," he said anxiously. "There's no one in the world without some cross or other. Teigue Donlon is always worrying over that kicking mare of his that near knocks the bottom out of the cart every market day going to Liscannow. If it's not one thing it's another—a shrew of a wife'd be worse than a domineering manager, for she'd be on the floor with you always, but you only see him once in a while."

"He won't kill me anyway," Maurice said laughing, as he went out.

On passing the store, his eye again caught the notice of Miss Barton's lectures. Father James had no control over her, he thought, and he smiled happily. How glad she'd be to be back with the Crawfords. . . .

He found Father Mahon seated at the desk in his study, picking his teeth with his little finger, his elbow resting on an open newspaper.

"Oh, is that you?" the priest said, staring at Maurice superciliously, and continuing the operation on his teeth with his tongue. When he had satisfactorily finished this, he motioned Maurice to a chair.

"Sit down. Here, take these books—I may forget 'em again." He took two account books off the desk. "Just copy all the names from this old station collection book into this new one. You'll have it done easily before the next station."

Maurice took the books and was rising to go when the priest waved his hand.

"Don't be in a hurry. How do you like your

school?" Without waiting for a reply, he went on: "It's a great position for a young man like you: good pay, and a great deal of the power of the Church over education delegated to you."

He got up, walked to the fire-place, and stood with his back to the fire that had recently been lighted.

"A fine position, and one that a man could well keep a wife on," he continued, rubbing his hands together with gusto. "Why, I expected you up here for a letter of freedom any day these two last Sarafts."

He laughed loudly at his own words, as if they held some humour that appealed to him. For a moment he looked almost jovial, but this expression soon faded and he looked down on Maurice with a frown.

"The master of a mixed school ought to be married," he said, sitting down near Maurice. "I had a talk with your mother a couple of months ago, and she thought the same. She mentioned Miss Devoy."

"I have no intention of marrying," Maurice said dryly.

"Oh, she said to give you time. You're doing fairly well in the school, fairly well. I wouldn't mind building a teacher's residence for you. Ye wouldn't miss the annuity on it with your two salaries joined together. As she's a sort of relation of my own, I'd let her down light in the marriage money. The Devoys haven't much but they'd be able to give her a few pounds, and I'd add a few to it for the sake of the relationship. She's not up to much in the way of looks, but it would be a good marriage for you."

Maurice laughed, a shrill treble. It had an uncanny sound to his own ears and he stopped it abruptly.

The priest gazed at him in open-mouthed astonishment. But soon his eyes blazed.

"What do you mean?" he asked angrily.

"I wish Miss Devoy's name hadn't been brought into this. I don't intend to marry," Maurice said in an even tone. His nerves were tingling. He was not a little awed by the priest's furious face, and was surprised at the firmness of his own voice.

"Are you mad?" the priest shouted.

Maurice stood up. Half nervously he asked—

"Can I do anything else for you?"

Father Mahon glared at him in speechless rage, pointed to the door, and spluttered as Maurice opened it—

"Teachers—scum—to slight me in my own parish!"

CHAPTER IX

FATHER JAMES MAHON was not given to self-analysis. All through his life he had taken himself for granted. He was always right. All who opposed his will were wrong. In any collision with external circumstance he, therefore, occupied an impregnable position. As a child he was his mother's favourite—she had early marked him out for the Church. In all disputes with his brothers and sisters she always upheld him. His confidence in himself increased when he was told that he was to be a priest. His favourite study in Maynooth was ecclesiastical history. His great hero was Pope Innocent III. His ideal was a Church ruling with uncontrolled power over all the nations of the earth. He knew little of popes or of the nations of the earth, and the little he learned from books he afterwards forgot, but he clung fast to his belief in power. He soon saw the Church in himself. Everything that added to his authority added to hers. While a student his field was limited. The only person he completely dominated was his mother. As a curate most of his time was wasted in trying to manage an easy-going parish priest who seemed to believe that it was the duty of a priest to serve the people, not to govern them. Weak-minded priests and bishops, like Father Barry, Father Mahon felt angrily, reduced the Church to its present foolish policy of

expediency. With priests and bishops like himself the Church would again rule the world. It was then he wrote his famous sermons on hell and on the dignity of the priesthood. He proved by irrefragible logic that the priest was higher than the Blessed Virgin, in a sense greater than Christ Himself, since he created Him anew daily in the mass. He determined to bide his time until he was himself a parish priest. Then he should have no Father Barry to interfere with him. When he got Bournreen parish he tasted all the sweets of power for some months. His housekeeper trembled when he spoke to her. Matsey Boylan's stammer became almost unintelligible with fright. Teachers grovelled before him, except Driscoll, and he was obedient. The people seemed submissive. Even the few Protestants, whose presence in the parish he resented, saluted him respectfully as they passed him by. His horizon widened. He felt that he ought to be a bishop. Then suddenly his cup had occasionally a bitter taste. A curate had the temerity to disobey him : with some difficulty he was removed. Things seemed to happen in the parish without his knowledge. He consoled himself with the thought that the people had been badly trained under the last parish priest ; some day he would exert all his authority and bring them well to heel. While he was yet devising means to this happy end the see of Liscannow fell vacant. Intriguing for the bishopric took up much of his time. Except for his farming and his sermons on Sundays, he neglected the parish. He hadn't time to manage the negotiations which changed most of the tenants into landowners. Co-operative societies, which he didn't much like, and Irish classes, which he disliked, had been set up.

After his disappointment in the bishopric he began to take his parish in hand again. The dues were readjusted to the changed conditions. His farming and the renewed prospect of the bishopric were both favourable.

And now, this bolt from the blue !

He sat hunched in front of the fire, biting his nails, after Maurice's departure. He was not thinking much. He was incapable of consecutive thought. He was bitterly offended, outraged. A wave of self-pity passed through him. Tears came into his eyes. But this mood did not last long. He jumped up, and stood frowning at the elm tree across the road. A teacher, of all the people in the world, to turn on him ! he thought bitterly, protruding his jaw. A fellow he could crush like a clod of earth under his heel ! He ground his heel on the carpet. This action calmed him considerably. His mind shifted to cattle. Should he sell those bullocks now or wait till October ? The agricultural inspector he met at the bishop's didn't know everything. There was more profit in fattening off young stock, no doubt, if one paid for the feed. But when one had free grass ? He sat at his desk and accepted an invitation to dinner at Dr. Hannigan's. He permitted himself a mild clerical joke. He read it over aloud and laughed appreciatively. He wrote "James Mahon, P.P.," at the end with a flourish. He addressed an envelope to the bishop. The "D.D." seemed to fascinate him. He began scribbling on a loose sheet of paper, "James Mahon" half a dozen times. Then, "James Mahon, D.D.;" then, "James Mahon, D.D.," and, under it, "Bishop of Liscannow." He tried it in Latin, "Jacobus Mahon, D.D., Episcopus

Liscannowensis," and gazed at it with an approving frown.

The figure of Maurice Blake came between him and the paper, and the frown lost all its lighter qualities. His eyebrows descended to the middle of his nose. That fellow looked so cool, too, not a bit afraid of him, he thought pettishly. He stood up and walked between the window and the fire-place. He rang for tea, and as he gulped it down he recalled his generosity and unselfishness in regard to the marriage. His anger grew again. That girl of the Devoys was very little to him, only a second cousin once removed. Still he wanted to do her a good turn, and Blake would have had the handling of her pay as well as his own. The protuberance at his waist-line visibly swelled with indignation. Blake was a fool, incapable of seeing what was for his good. He didn't expect gratitude from any one, least of all from teachers. The world was selfish, but Blake was worse than ungrateful, he was rebellious. He threw the girl back in the face of his manager, his parish priest! What would the Church come to if it tolerated offences like that? This new aspect of the question lent a certain grave dignity to his figure. His frown became more thoughtful. There was no sign of rain in the sky, he said to himself, as he glanced through the window. He would give instructions that Hinnissey should plough the turnip field if he came to-morrow. It was early yet for turnips, but . . .

He went to the fire-place and poked the fire. He struck a sod vigorously, and a few small pieces flew out on the hearthrug. He trod on them. What was this behaviour of Blake's but the beginning of anti-clericalism? There was a lot of

it about, but it should take no root in his parish while he had the life left in him to prevent it. And what was anti-clericalism but heresy and a trampling on all morality and all religion? How could even a breath of such an evil arise in a parish of his, with his sermons and care for the souls and bodies of his people?

This thought worried him a little. He gazed moodily at the fire, now glowing brightly. He gave a sigh of relief as a new thought came to him. It was the curate's fault, of course. But this relief did not last. His thoughts suddenly took on an angry hue. Curates always worked mischief. And Malone had no idea of the dignity of the priesthood. He dragged it in the mud by letting the people presume on him; by being hand and glove with every Tom, Dick, and Harry in the parish—often having Driscoll or Blake in to spend the evening with him; even visiting them as if they were his equals. . . .

He took up a newspaper, but it was too dark to read with comfort. He put out his hand to ring for the lamp, hesitated and got up. He would see Father Malone that very night and have a talk with him, he decided.

Malone had his uses of course, he thought, during the short walk to the village. He said the late masses, attended all the night calls, and never made a fuss over going to the poorer sick-calls that it wasn't worth a parish priest's while to attend—maybe a half-crown mass offering; maybe nothing at all. The devil you know is better than the devil you don't know, and if he got rid of Malone he might get worse. He'd be wary enough in talking with him, but he'd take right good care he'd shorten his rope in the parish. . . .

He knocked loudly at Father Malone's door, which was opened, after a few minutes, by the curate himself.

"Maria out craw-thumping as usual?" Father Mahon said, setting his face to the frown he intended for a smile, as he laid his overcoat and silk hat on a table in the hall.

"I dare say she is in the church."

"I let mine out only to mass on Sundays. If you don't learn to control your servant, you'll never be able to manage a parish," Father Mahon said with a harsh laugh.

Father Malone shrugged his shoulders and pointed the way to his sitting-room.

"Not a bad little house for a curate," Father Mahon said, looking round the room complacently. "It was Board of Works money, of course, but I practically built it myself."

Father Malone pointed ruefully to the wall by the window, where the green paper was discoloured and hung loose about the skirting.

Father Mahon took the lamp in his hand and examined the paper.

"That'll dry out. It's only a few years built," he said, a little crossly.

"Six," Father Malone said laconically.

"That's new," Father Mahon said, lifting the lamp so that the light shone higher on the wall, and nodding towards a picture.

"It's rather nice," Father Malone said brightening. "A pastel. It's only a sketch, but see how he got the twilight—and that effect of the crescent moon over the shoulder of the figure."

"I thought it was a rake she was carrying," Father Mahon said indifferently. "If you want to

see pictures drop in one evening and I'll show you some," he added, putting the lamp on the table. "I bought a dozen beauties from a travelling German man the other day. He wanted five pounds, but I cut him down to three, and they're dirt cheap at the money."

His eyes wandered round the room with a look of contempt—to another pastel; a few pen and ink sketches; a few prints; long, open book shelves of white enamelled deal, and a worn and faded carpet.

"You pick up enough money in this parish to do better," he said condescendingly.

"Take this armchair. It's the most comfortable," Father Malone said dryly, pushing it close to the fender.

Father Mahon sat down, spread his hands to the blaze, at which he gazed thoughtfully with a deeply lined brow.

Father Malone sat at the other corner of the fender and lit a pipe.

"There's no use asking you to smoke," he said.

"It's a dirty habit," Father Mahon said, spitting at the fire.

"A glass of punch?"

"No—I don't think I will. A teetotaller never keeps good whiskey," with an ungracious laugh.

"Maria will get some tea when she comes in."

"I had my own, but I'll take a cup. This parish weighs so heavy on my mind that I slipped my tea down without feeling the good of it."

"What's wrong now?" Father Malone said smiling.

"Oh, one thing and another," Father Mahon said fretfully.

"The country is coming to a queer pass," he said abruptly, after a few minutes' silence, straightening himself in his chair and frowning at the curate.

Father Malone shook the ashes out of his pipe into the grate, tapped the empty pipe on his knee, his blue eyes fixed dreamily on the fire.

"There is movement," he said. "That is a great thing."

"There is. Down the hill to the devil," Father Mahon said angrily.

The curate took off his glasses, wiped them, put them on again, clasped his hands, which still held his pipe, round his knees, and looked at Father Mahon, a smile playing on the corners of his lips.

This seemed to irritate Father Mahon. His lips and eyebrows twitched spasmodically.

"You're little better than a fool," he said, "talking that nonsense. There isn't as much sense in you young fellows as there is in the head of a tom-tit. I tell you the people are growing out of their skins. Only last Saraft Thady Finucane had the impudence to rise against the marriage money I put on his daughter. Do you think any good'll come to the parish when the likes of that happens?"

"I suppose the parish'll benefit by the improvement of Thady's farm. He's putting every penny he can spare into draining that bottom land of his," Father Malone said quietly.

"I'm thinking of the people's souls," Father Mahon said loudly. "You——" He bit his lip, restrained his anger with difficulty and said, with an attempt at a friendly tone—

"It's a nice parish you'd have the ruling of, when it comes to your turn, if there wasn't the like of me to advise you. I'm not blaming you much.

You're young yet and don't know the difference. Take my word for it, the only way to rule the people is to keep a tight hand on them."

Maria came in with a tray which she laid on a chair. "I heard your voice in the hall so I brought a second cup," she said to Father Mahon. She spread a cloth over the half of the table nearest the priests.

"I'm heard where I'm not seen," he said pompously.

"Bedad you are," she said dryly. "It's what I was remarking to Father Malone himself to-day about Tim Carty's ass, and he braying in the field the other side of the hedge. I——"

"That will do, Maria, thank you," Father Malone said hastily. "I'll finish laying the table. Would you take those papers in the hall down to Mr. Driscoll's?"

"I could easily do both," she said. "The night is long, and I was just saying——"

Father Malone took the tray out of her hands, and she left the room grumbling.

"I'd pitch her out neck and crop," Father Mahon said scowling. "The cheeky old hag!"

Father Malone smiled at the tray. "Do you like your tea strong?" he asked mildly.

Father Mahon was now in a sulky rage. "I do," he said shortly.

He ate a thick slice of bread and butter in silence, drank a cup of tea in a gulp and banged the cup on the saucer. Maria evidently rankled in his mind. He pushed away his plate and it rattled against the tray.

"If I thought she meant that for me I'd give her a reading to," he said.

"It's not much good lecturing Maria," Father Malone said apologetically.

"Your lecturing of her, you mean," Father Mahon said, standing up. "It's no wonder things'd be as they are with the kind of weak-minded curates I get."

The curate shrugged his shoulders, laughed softly and went on eating.

"It's no laughing matter—and the parish going to the dogs," Father Mahon said, after glaring at him for a few seconds. He turned to the fire, bit his nails and kicked restlessly at the fender.

"If you'd only tell me what's wrong?" Father Malone said. He stood up and began to fill a pipe. "What have I done? I'd rather have it straight out."

"How thin-skinned we are! Did I say you did anything wrong? A parish priest can't open his mouth but he's flared up at like this," Father Mahon said, flopping back into his armchair.

Father Malone sighed, lit his pipe, sat down and smoked quietly.

"You're too thick with those schoolmasters in the village for one thing. I never cared much for old Driscoll, but he's a king to that conceited young pup that I was fool enough to give the school to after him."

"Giving Maurice Blake Bourneen was the best day's work you ever did for the parish," Father Malone said emphatically. He put a few sods of turf on the fire and patted them carefully into place with the tongs.

"If the school was vacant again, he'd whistle for it."

This remark of Father Mahon's roused Father

Malone to fresh vigour with the tongs. He was a little flushed. A tightening of the lips and a gleam behind his glasses hardened his mobile face. He struck a live sod sharply and a cloud of golden sparks ascended the chimney. His anger seemed to go with them.

"This is a joke, I suppose? Maurice Blake conceited!" he laughed lightly.

"You might laugh at the wrong side of your mouth yet unless you're said by me. I know that fellow and you don't. I can read his face like a book. He's bad in and out, I tell you."

Father Malone leant back in his chair and gazed at the parish priest curiously with level eyes.

"What has *he* done to you?" he asked ironically.

This was too much for Father Mahon. He stood up and towered angrily over the curate whose unflinching eyes seemed to provoke him to further anger.

"He——" he foamed. "What could a worm like him do to me?" he asked, after a moment's hesitation. "It's his disrespect for the Church I object to. I never think of myself. But I have a position to maintain. The way that fellow stands and looks at me, his parish priest and manager, when I call at his school! He's meddling, too, in the affairs of the parish—those societies and that tupenny ha'penny bank. Neglecting the work he's paid for!"

"Barring Driscoll, he's the best teacher you ever had."

"He's a downright scamp, that's what he is. If ever a man was put in his place I'll put *him* there."

Father Malone shrugged his shoulders. "I

don't think I care to discuss my friends," he said quietly.

"If I find you backing people that rebel against me the bishop will hear of it," Father Mahon said with a menacing look.

Father Malone made no reply. Father Mahon walked up and down the room, giving an occasional furtive glance at the curate, who was gazing wearily at the fire. A pleased look gradually overspread Father Mahon's face, and he muttered to himself, "That knocked the stuffing out of him." He sat down again and gave an uneasy boisterous laugh.

"I'm too good a friend to you to fight with you, Malone," he said ingratiatingly.

He waited for a reply, but as Father Malone said nothing, his eyes gleamed again. With an effort he mastered his temper and said soberly—

"If I spoke to you it was for your good. The old dog for the long road ! and I can read the signs of the times better than a young curate like you. Priests must stand together in defence of the old Church. She needs the best that's in every one of us. The devil is busy sowing ideas in people's heads, and we've got to pluck 'em out by the roots. Give the people an inch and they'll take an ell. If once we let go our hold of the reins, they'll take the bit between their teeth. Believe you me, the fear of hell in the marrow of their bones, and absolute obedience to their priests is the only salvation for the people of this country. You're too mild with them. Mind, I'm not finding fault with your sermons on charity, and bearing one another's burthens and the like—they're nice little things in their way ; but if you'd only take a leaf out of my book, and give 'em hell and the dignity of the priesthood, the parish'd

be all the better for it. And I'm all for the people when it's for their good. Land purchase was all right. It turned a lot of Protestant land into Catholic hands, and it gave the people a chance—not that they were too willing to take it—to give more respectable support to their hard-working clergy. And there's the tidy farm attached to the parochial house that I bought in cheap myself, that'll cheer the heart of future generations of parish priests of Bourneen. Who knows but yourself might have it one day! I'm in two minds about this co-operation. On the one hand, it makes the people better off. On the other hand, it gives them airs of being able to do things without the help of their parish priest. It'd be better for the Church any day that they'd be living in muck than have that kind of independence. I was busy over one thing and another and I had to let you mess about these societies. The opposition to them is dying down a bit too. Now that I've more time on my hands I'll take my proper place at the front of them, and see if I can't head them in the right direction. I may or may not be long in the parish—that's in God's hands—but while I'm in it I'm going to be master in my own house. But now that we're having a friendly chat, I give you friendly warning that I'll have no truck with the Irish language. You know my mind on it already. If there was any good to be got out of it I'd be the first to see it, and I speaking it from the cradle, in my father's house. It's leading to all kinds of devilry. Up to this I've only given an odd side-blast against it in a sermon; but I tell you straight, so that you can draw out of it in time, that I'll drive it out of the schools and out of the parish."

He wound up the long speech on a hectoring note, slapping his leg with his open palm. He noticed that Father Malone was watching the fire with a troubled face.

"Don't be sitting there like a stuck pig. If you've got anything to say out with it," he said in a self-satisfied voice.

Father Malone roused himself. "Is there any hope of arguing you out of these views?" he asked despairingly.

Father Mahon looked at him compassionately. He took a snuff-box from his waistcoat pocket and tapped it.

"You might know me better. I could no more be moved than Slieve Mor, when once I've made up my mind to a thing. And for why? Because I know I'm right," he said complacently. He opened the box and took a huge pinch in each nostril. "There's no more to be said. It's for the parish priest to lay down the law, and for the curate to obey," he added, rising. "Come and have a bite of dinner with me to-morrow, and I'll put more common sense into you."

"I think I ought to say," Father Malone said, "that I disagree with almost every word you said."

Father Mahon looked him all over with a supercilious frown, laughed and said—

"Curates always come round. When I lead a horse to the water, I usually make him drink. If he doesn't, it's so much the worse—for the horse. Why, what's this?" he added, catching sight of a poster pinned to the side of a standing desk by the window.

"Those poultry lectures," Father Malone said coldly.

"Who in the world got her here?" Father Mahon said, when he had read to the end.

"The Agricultural Society."

"It's time I took it out of your hands. Bringing in women to trapse round my parish! Some fool of a girl that doesn't know a cock from a hen. Barton—that's not a Catholic name," he added frowning.

"She's a Protestant, I believe—a niece of John Crawford's."

"What is the world coming to? And my own curate having a hand in it too! I can't turn my back for a minute but these things are happening. This is the thin end of the wedge to get education out of the hands of the Church. It's rank atheism to bring a Protestant woman to teach anything in a Catholic parish like this."

He stalked out of the room and banged the front door behind him.

Meanwhile, on leaving the parochial house, Maurice Blake had taken the Liscannow road. He had some work to do at home, but he had gone nearly two miles out of his way before he noticed his direction. He moved the account books from under one arm to the other and laughed. It was ludicrous, he said aloud, but his laugh had a hollow ring and his words did not convince him. He had walked hitherto with a vague feeling of restlessness, almost without thought, his eyes, however, alert to the changing colour of the sky, crimson and orange and translucent green. He stood for a moment hesitating, and, without coming to any decision, walked on. It was quite dark under the trees as the road skirted the Durrisk demesne. The high wall

echoed his footsteps. He went slowly past the big iron gates and thought of the ghost that was said to haunt the avenue. He felt almost as if he expected to see it, his nerves were so jumpy. He tightened his fingers on the books and thought again of Father Mahon. There was nothing to worry about. It was all a joke of the priest's. Even if it wasn't, what could he do to injure him? The priest's face seemed to stand out luminously in the dark. He shivered a little. He pulled himself together and increased his pace. A manager wasn't an autocrat in these days. A teacher was a servant of the state, not of the priest. He whistled a lively jig tune. . . .

The tea-things were still on the table in the kitchen when he got home.

"What in the world kept you this late?" Driscoll said.

"I walked to Liscannow, and sat awhile on the quay watching the boats."

"What did the big man want of you?"

Maurice told him.

The old man listened attentively but did not speak for some time.

"'Twas honester by the girl to speak straight out," he said musingly. "Though I'd as lief you gave him a softer answer. Maybe no harm'll come of it."

Later, as he seemed to pore over a book, Maurice heard him say above his breath, "He's a cruel hard man to be up against. Thank God, he can't break a man's soul."

CHAPTER X

A DEPUTATION from the Agricultural Society, consisting of Driscoll and Larry Reardon, called on Father Mahon and asked him for the use of the schoolroom for Miss Barton's lectures. He hummed and hawed, bit his nails and peremptorily refused. He declined to preside at her opening lecture. There was some murmuring at the subsequent meeting of the society. Hinnissey said that it was a queer thing that the say of one man, no matter how high and mighty he was, should make smithereens of the wishes of the people, and the schoolhouse, in a kind of a way, belonging to them too. Tom Blake was strongly of opinion that by rights they could force in the door. But his father's milder counsel prevailed. A priest was a priest, he said, and in an affair of the sort it might be better in the long run to try and spell out a way of circumventing him than to take a short cut, and maybe break their heads agin a stone wall at the end of it. The corrugated-iron manure shed belonging to the society, empty at this season, was swept and garnished. The mud of years was partially scrubbed off the boarded floor. Seats were borrowed throughout the village. Master Driscoll decked the lecturer's table with his sweetest scented flowers, which, to some extent, neutralized the pervasive smell of guano. Here, with Father Malone in the chair, Alice Barton was to give her first lecture.

Maurice Blake sat in an obscure corner, whither the feeble light of the few hanging lamps, slung temporarily from the open rafters, scarcely penetrated. He had spent an anxious fortnight. Every day for a week he expected Father Mahon to interfere with his work. But the priest had not come to the school and on Sunday he preached his mildest sermon with a preoccupied air. After mass Driscoll had "sounded" Father Malone, who said, laughing, that the Bishop of Droomeen was ill again and that Father Mahon would not bother much about the parish till the bishop was dead or well. This news relieved Maurice for a few hours, but he soon began to worry about the success of Alice Barton's lecture. It was a busy time with the farmers.

"Do you think they'll turn up?" he asked Master Driscoll a dozen times.

"And the meeting fixed for half an hour after dusk. The whole parish'll be there, you'll see."

This comforting assurance did not, however, ease his mind. It was some relief to him that Alice had actually arrived at the Crawfords'. But despite all his efforts his anxiety persisted. Master Driscoll asked him to be on the look-out for the girl and to show her the way in to the store when she arrived.

He accepted this duty gladly, but a few hours before the lecture, he resigned it to Driscoll, on the plea that he had to see that everything was right inside. Long before sunset he came to the shed, arranged and re-arranged seats, and moved the vase of flowers from one corner of the table to another. At dusk he lit the lamps. He looked at his watch every two or three minutes. Matsey Boylan was the first to arrive. He took a front seat, saying—

"I want to get a good view of her. I hear she's a fine figure of a girl. And who knows?"

This so disgusted Maurice that he went out to the yard and walked up and down restlessly. He asked himself crossly why he had come so early—other lectures had taken care of themselves once all the arrangements were made? And the answer came readily: the other lecturers were men, but this was a woman and a stranger. His sense of chivalry soothed him. It occurred to him that the men were strangers too, but he put this irrelevant thought away. Then the audience began to trickle in, and he took his seat.

When the hall was about a third full he felt that the meeting should be a success. The audience was mostly women, but the scent of strong tobacco came through the open door, and he could hear men talking and laughing in the yard.

"They're worse gossips than the women, them men are, with their excuse of a shaugh of a pipe. It'd be the price of 'em if they hadn't a seat to get when they came within," Mrs. Hinnissey said aloud, a few seats in front of Maurice.

"What do the poor things know about hens anyway?" Mrs. Reardon said. "The wonder to me is what men want to hear about 'em for at all."

"If what Jack read out of the weekly paper last Sunday is true, we'll be soon wearing the breeches. So the sooner the men learn about the hens the better," Mrs. Hinnissey said boisterously.

"Do you hear her now, and she wearing 'em ever since she married Jack Hinnissey," Mrs. Reardon said slyly.

"There's no fault to be found with any woman for doing that same," Mrs. Blake said seriously.

Men now crowded in at the door, soon filled all the seats and stood at the back and sides of the room.

"She's outside with the priest and Master Driscoll," a man said, jerking his thumb back towards the door.

After a short interval Master Driscoll appeared, and good-humouredly pushed the people aside to make a clear passage to the platform of rough planks on which stood the table and a few chairs.

"Now, your reverence," he said from the door.

But it was Alice Barton who came forward, a smiling self-possessed Alice Barton, Maurice noticed, his heart thumping against his ribs. He shrank back into his seat in an effort to get further away from the light. She took the cheers of the audience quietly, giving a few little bows as Driscoll led her to the table with a gracious courtesy that reminded Maurice of a chivalrous knight in a medieval tale he had read sometime. He had no eyes for the priest and the others who followed. They must have followed, for the priest was now sitting at the table with Alice beside him, chatting with her as if she were some ordinary person.

She hadn't changed in the least. The pink in her cheeks was a shade deeper, and her eyes sparkled while the priest was introducing her. She even nodded to a few people whom she recognized in front. He was a little disappointed that she did not nod to him. But she couldn't see him—even if she did see him, it was unlikely that she would remember him, he thought, a momentary feeling of satisfaction giving place to doubt. Then she began to speak.

"She's only a slip of a thing," a man said near by.

"Hush, hush," Maurice said, frowning.

He expected a different opening—some glimpse of the dreams she unfolded to him in the Crawfords' kitchen. But it was all plain fact. She even made small jokes. He noticed her hands for the first time, and the width between her eyes. These seemed to explain to him the hold she had on her audience—and her wonderful voice that gave colour to the driest details. For whole minutes he lost the thread of what she was saying. It did not seem to matter. It was enough to see her, the light on her profile. The oil-lamps smoked and grew dim. One or two went out. He blamed himself for having lighted them so early. Then he thought it was well that the hall was dark, for, beyond the vague shapes of the audience, she seemed a radiant vision. . . .

In a business-like tone she was blaming the lamp-lighter when he next heard her.

"I have to show diagrams and plans at the next lecture," she said, "and the hall must be better lighted."

Which was nonsense, he felt, for the light from the mean paraffin lamp on the table was enough to gild the wave of hair that just touched the tip of her ear, itself a rose-pink, close-set shell.

She sketched her future programme. The lectures were only fireworks, it seemed. The main part of her work was to be done by house-to-house visits and practical demonstrations. He was glad that her stay seemed to stretch ahead for months.

Master Driscoll proposed a vote of thanks. "In old ancient times," he said, "the glory of a

great people sprang from an egg. Who knows what the egg might bring to Bourneen and to Ireland."

In homely phrases that came from his heart, he thanked the lecturer.

There were loud calls for Master Blake. He racked his brains for something to say. As he got to his feet he thought of her as the Angel Gabriel, as Joan of Arc. His lips were dry, and his tongue clave to his palate. He clutched the chair in front of him. In a voice that sounded, in his own ears, harsh, ponderous, cold and inadequate, he said—

"I second the vote of thanks."

There was a dreadful silence, during which he seemed to fall down a bottomless pit. Some one clapped; every one clapped. Father Malone was speaking, and Maurice felt himself at rest in his chair.

A buzz of conversation arose after the final clapping of hands at the close of the priest's speech.

"We'll never be done with all the new things that's thrown at us—one day it's a new way of making butter, and another it's a new way of laying eggs," Mrs. Blake said.

"When you're stuck in the house all day, it's a great relief to get out for a start. She wasn't near as exciting as a mission sermon, but I wouldn't say that she didn't pass the time well enough," Mrs. Reardon said, with a satisfied sigh.

"She was grand, that's what she was," Hanny said hotly.

Maurice felt grateful to her, and thought that Hanny was almost beautiful in her angry flush.

"She didn't make as many mistakes as I thought she might," Mrs. Blake said dryly. "Come along up home with us, Maurice," she added; "Mike wants to have a word with you."

Maurice was the last to leave the shed. He put out the lamps and stood blinking in the doorway, a lighted match in his hand. He heard the priest say—

"Good night, and thank you again."

It was a moonless night. The match flickered and went out. He saw vague shapes in the yard.

"Come over here," he heard in Master Driscoll's voice.

He fumbled with the lock.

"You had charge of the lamps, I'm told. I'm sorry I spoke of them; but they were pretty bad, you know."

So she had not gone yet. He laughed. The bewildering feeling that overcame him all the evening vanished with the laugh.

"I'd never trust a man to trim a wick," Mrs. Crawford said.

"How is the Irish going on?" Alice said, as she shook hands.

"Walk up a bit of the road with them. My eyes are too bad in this light to travel far," Driscoll said.

"Don't trouble. Uncle John'll keep off the good people at the holy well—though I wish I saw them for once," Alice said, with a low laugh.

"Though I don't believe in them, I never make light of them, all the same," Crawford said solemnly, in rebuke.

"I have to go up as far as my father's, in any case," Maurice said, as he walked on at Alice's side.

They threaded their way through little groups of people and followed in the wake of a small procession up the village street. Mrs. Hinnissey's loud laugh rose high above disjointed scraps of talk, but even she was silent in passing Father Mahon's.

"I feel more at home here than at Dublin—the people are all so friendly," Alice said, her voice ringing out clearly against the silence.

"And why wouldn't they?" Maurice said.

He wanted to talk, but he could find nothing more to say. The opaque clouds had blown away, and clusters of stars danced in a dark blue sky, which grew almost black as he gazed at it, so bright were the quivering fires with which it was studded. Yet her face showed only in a faintly luminous outline. . . .

"There's your gate," she said.

"I'll go as far as the boreen—I want a walk."

She talked of Drumquin and the preparations that were being made there for the Liscannow Feis.

"I'm looking forward to it so much. I've been at the Oirechtas in Dublin, but never at a country Feis. You're going, of course?"

"I'm on the committee," he said shyly.

"I might have known," she said, looking at him.

"We're in rather a fix in Bourneen school over the singing," he said hastily. "Joan Bradley, the old workmistress, used to take it, but she's gone to live in Liscannow. Miss Devoy doesn't sing. I take the class now, but I'm no good. Father Malone helps, but he's not much better. The children are entered at the Feis for singing, but they're sure to do badly."

She clapped her hands and danced along the road. He looked at her in astonishment.

"What's the girl up to?" John Crawford said from behind.

"I'm not mad—or glad they're so bad—there's a rhyme for you!—I'll turn into a poet next. I'm not all eggs and poultry. Let me train them? I know all the set pieces by heart already. I was helping with the singing at Drumquin."

Dark as it was, he could see her eyes glow with excitement.

"You sing then?"

She shrugged her shoulders, and became sedate at once. Of course she sang, he answered himself: with her voice! It was ridiculous of him to ask. He was framing words to thank her, when she laughed, began to hum between her teeth, and sang in a deep contralto, "Silent, O Moyle, be the roar of thy waters." The sad minor notes seemed to catch his heart.

"Alice, if the people hear you, and they're in front of you and behind you, they won't believe you're any good with the hens," Mrs. Crawford said anxiously.

"I sing often to drown their cackle," she said, stopping abruptly.

"Thank you," Maurice said huskily.

"It's not much of a voice," she said lightly, "but it's good enough to teach with."

He said nothing, but he felt the notes still echoing in the thin vibrant air. . . .

He found himself thanking her for her offer to teach.

"I enjoy it. One gets tired of poultry sometimes."

"You'll be a regular Fenian before you're ended," John Crawford said, catching them up at turn of the boreen, "with all your Feis and nonsense."

"On Saturdays, then, and any afternoon just after school that I'm free—half-past three, is it?" she called after Maurice as he walked away.

"Half-past three," he echoed.

This was a stroke of luck, he thought. What a useful person she would be in the parish. He returned the greetings of a group who threw a "good night" out into the unknown. When he spoke, one said warmly, "Why, it's the young master! God bless you, and good night again." The road was springy to-night, he felt, as he swung along rapidly. There was a fresh feel in the air. He inhaled long breaths. What was that indefinable odour that cleared his brain and made it so keen to all impressions? The earth in a ploughed field on his right had the freshness of renewed youth. A star blinked at him joyously from a tiny pool on the roadside. He even listened for some sound of growth and life in the filmy shoots that nodded at him from the hedgerows. He recognized Tom's bulky form leaning over, the Reardons' gate, and a shawled figure beyond, but he passed by unnoticed. He began to hum, "Silent, O Moyle."

His father was blowing out the candle in a stable lantern when he opened the door. Hanny was wiping cups at the dresser.

"I thought you'd never come," his mother said, in her usual seat between the lamp and the fire, patching Mike's coat.

"I was seeing the Crawfords home," he said brightly.

"I suppose they're that blind they couldn't see the way for themselves."

"Whist, woman, don't be contráry, and I not ready for him myself till this minute," Mike said, taking his seat on the hob. "By rights Tom should be seeing after the cattle, but he's not in yet."

"He's not," Mrs. Blake said crossly. "You be off to bed, Hanny. You must be up early in the morning. You can say your own rosary by the side of the bed, or, if it's too cold there, between the blankets."

She turned round and watched Hanny finish her work.

"That girl to-night doesn't know the value of money," Mike said, lighting his pipe. "The notion of giving up good land to the feeding of hens! Who ever heard the like? And the expense of them little houseens she spoke of too!"

"There's money in it," Maurice said with a smile, drawing a chair towards the fire.

Mike pulled at his pipe for a minute. "If there is, I don't see it," he said.

"Tom will——" Maurice was beginning.

"Tom, Tom—I'm sick of Tom this blessed night," Mrs. Blake interrupted. "There, she's gone now," as Hanny shut the door of her bedroom, "and we can talk." She drew her stool closer to Maurice, rested her hands on her knees, and looked gloomily at the fire. "I suppose I'll have to let that girl of the Reardons' in on the floor to me at last," she said angrily.

"But you like her?" Maurice said in surprise.

"Tom was my first," she said, sobbing and wiping her eyes with her apron.

"Don't, mother, don't," Maurice said anxiously, laying his hand on her knee.

She caught his hand and pressed it to her bosom and said, still sobbing—

"And a good son he was to me, too. Not that I'd mind him marrying—it's her coming in on the floor to me, and being day and night before my eyes, that I can't abide."

"Whist, woman—whist," Mike said. "There's more important matters to attend to than that. There's making the match," he added gravely.

Mrs. Blake's sobs died away. "That's what he wanted to see you about," she said, releasing Maurice's hand.

"We all know they've made the match themselves, long ago," Maurice said laughing.

"That's only fool talk," Mike said, striking his pipe emphatically against his palm, "and there not being a word yet with Larry Reardon about what fortune she's to get."

Maurice shrugged his shoulders. "Tom'd be glad to take her without a penny."

"Have a spark of sense in you now, boy," Mike said angrily. "You're great on keeping up the customs of the country," he added sarcastically, after a pause, "and here's one that was in the parish since the beginning of the world. I was thinking," he continued more graciously, "that myself and yourself'd go up some night and strike the bargain with Larry. He's that naygurly and close-fisted, with all his soft talk, that we'd have to bid the highest penny to start with, so as to give us a liscense for climbing down a bit afterwards."

Maurice wriggled in his chair. He had always hated this custom, and to-night it seemed more

appalling than ever. He smiled as he thought he saw a way out of his difficulty.

"There's Jim Reardon and Hanny—they care for each other. Make a double match of it, and there needn't be any bargaining," he said triumphantly.

"The whole parish knows that the Reardons won't let Jim take a wife for a couple of years or more," Mrs. Blake said.

"But if they were engaged——"

"As if I'd trust to a thing like that," Mike said contemptuously. "I've known a match made on the Friday before Shrove Tuesday, and it was broke off and the man married to another girl on Shrove Tuesday evening. Who knows what'd happen in a couple of years? A bird in the hand, I always heard, is worth as many as you like to name in a bush. Sorra foot Minnie enters that door there till I have Larry's money tight in my breast pocket."

"There's no hurry, anyway, Lent isn't over yet," Maurice said, temporizing.

"We must be ready the first thing after Easter, so it's time to put a face on it. We struck against it last Saraft, but there's no standing Tom since with the black sulks that's on him. Will you come with me, or will you not?" Mike said, rising impatiently.

"I shouldn't be the least use."

Mike considered this, gazing thoughtfully at Maurice.

"There's that way of looking at it. Maybe after all Jack Hinnissey'd be a better back to me. He knows Larry inside out, too. Whist!"

The latch rattled and Tom came in. "It's a fine starry night," he said.

"It is," Mike said, lighting a candle. "It's every man for himself, I believe, with the rosary to-night," he added, yawning.

"There was sense in what that girl at the Crawfords' said at the lecture," Tom said, when Mike had retired to the room. "I'll be seeing about that fowl run to-morrow."

"There, take that," his mother handed him a candle. "It's all hours! Sleep sound, agra—it's you're the biddable boy."

She threw her arms around his neck, kissed him on the shoulder, and then pushed him away from her. He looked at her in astonishment, blushed furiously, opened his mouth, turned away without speaking, and flicked the lighted candle with his fingers as he ascended the ladder.

"And why wouldn't he marry?" she said half to herself, watching him till he disappeared over the stair head.

Maurice had risen to leave. She turned to him.

"I had it agin him some way," she said brokenly, "to pick out a girl for himself. There's your father and myself now, never set eyes on other till we met in front of the priest at the altar rails. But the will of God be done."

He kissed her, and she clung to him for a moment.

"Will I soon be hearing of yourself?" she said, holding his hand. "Father James was dead set on it."

He frowned a little, and she said eagerly, "If you don't care for her now itself, it'd come. And it would be a fine marriage for you."

"There is no use in speaking of it, mother," he said gently.

She looked at him for a long time, tears brimming her eyes.

"I don't know what's over me to-night. It's that fool of a Tom, or something. I haven't it in my heart to push you to what you don't like. There isn't a stime of common-sense left in me. Put the hasp on the half-door and you going out."

As he walked home he felt young again. He lingered by the stream, listening to the gurgling of the water. It sang some new song to his heart.

CHAPTER XI

RAIN beat heavily on the school cottage. It swished against the windows as if invisible hands caught it up in immense buckets and dashed it with unerring aim at intervals of a few seconds. It fell in thuds on the sodden roof ; sizzled on the smouldering fire, which belched smoke and peat ash, acrid and penetrating. The water-barrels had long since overflowed, and Master Driscoll, in oil clothes and sou'-wester, with many sighs, had broken up his garden path, and raked out a passage for the water to the front gate, through which it flowed in a steady stream to join other swirling waters in a fierce rush for the hollow at the foot of the hill, where, not satisfied with making the road impassable, it made small lakes of the adjoining fields.

"It might be February instead of the middle of summer," Driscoll said cheerfully. A little sadly he added, "The poor flowers and the poor farmers ! If it doesn't stop soon the country'll be in a bad way."

Maurice nodded in sympathy. "And the Feis'll be spoiled," he said.

"And the Feis, to be sure," Driscoll said, blowing the fire with a bellows. "We've done all we can now. After the morning's work I've an appetite for my breakfast."

Maurice ventured out again by the back door.

A gust of rain rushed round the corner of the house and struck him in the face. He looked up the wind and down for signs of change, sighed, and turned back. There was no gleam in the murky pall.

"It might clear at the turn of the tide. There won't be much harm done by then," Driscoll said, spreading the tablecloth.

"It might," Maurice said hopelessly.

Breakfast took a long time to prepare. Toast was given up as impossible. "It'll take us all our time to boil the eggs," Driscoll said. They sat down at last to a gloomy meal. Then suddenly a lull came.

"Hark," Driscoll said, holding his cup in mid-air. The rain against the window had become a tiny patter. The fire ceased to splutter. The room lightened into a soft grey. "What did I tell you?" he said excitedly.

The rain had stopped by the time Maurice had opened the front door. A thick grey fog, with a sheen of silver in it, drifted by towards the east.

"That's not much better," he said.

"The Feis'll be all right. Wait a bit. Come back and finish your breakfast."

The room grew brighter as they ate. When they had finished, Driscoll said—

"You might be changing your clothes now. Them things you have on you are drenched."

The sun shone through Maurice's window as he finished dressing. He hurried to the garden, where Driscoll stood smiling in his best black coat and grey trousers, a black bow tie straggling down his white shirt front from the wings of his Gladstone collar.

"Look at that now," he said proudly, as if he

had wrought the wonderful transformation, waving his arms around.

The wet, rocky surface of Slieve Mor caught the sun in broken sheets of silver flame. The sapphire sky was soft and tender as the smile in a child's eyes after tears. Away in the east the fog, driven by a light wind, whose force seemed to have spent itself in the effort, was fading into the horizon. The jewelled hedge sparkled. The drooping flowers, already lifting joyous though battered heads to the sun, perfumed the air.

"That trifle of rain only put the heart into them. A prop here and there, and they'll be as fit as a fiddle," Driscoll said, fingering the buds of a carnation.

Maurice gave a contented sigh.

"After all our work, it'd have been a pity to have a bad day for the Liscannow Feis."

"God is good to us. Everything has had a smile on it for the last couple of months. I never saw the people in better fettle for the right sort of things. I'd better make up that path before we start. We have an hour to the good yet, and time to walk at our leisure after. Well, Matsey, what do you want?"

"Good morning, masters both," Matsey said, opening the gate. "It's a letter I have from his reverence for Maurice Blake there."

He shambled up the path.

"It's dressed up ye are. I'm going myself too. I was telling Father James all about the Feis, and we driving home last night from Liscannow. Though," with a leer, "I didn't let on to him I was going there myself. Catch me at that. He was as mad as a hatter at times, and he was ladling questions

out of me like you'd be emptying the big barrel beyond with a cuppeen."

"'Tis you have the long tongue on you, Matsey," Driscoll said laughing.

"Where is the letter?" Maurice asked.

"'Deed, if I didn't forget it in all my talking." He turned out several pockets, and finally found it in his greasy hat.

While Maurice was opening the letter, Matsey said confidentially to Driscoll in a low voice, jerking his thumb in the direction of Liscannow—

"Is she sure to be in it?"

"Who?"

"Sure you know. She has the heart haunted in me. Miss Barton, I mean. She's a girl for you, now, that any man might be took with."

Driscoll laughed heartily, but stopped suddenly when he saw Maurice's face.

"What is it?" he asked anxiously.

Maurice laughed harshly. "Read that."

Driscoll took the letter. "Run off with you, Matsey, or you'll be late for the Feis," he said, opening his spectacle case.

Matsey slouched away grumbling. Maurice watched Driscoll fix the spectacles on his nose.

"Read it out," he said impatiently. "I want to hear how it sounds."

"To the principal teacher, Bourneen National School," Driscoll read.

"As your manager, I hereby forbid you to attend the Liscannow Feis in any capacity whatever. If any children from my school attend, I shall hold you responsible."

"Well, well, well," Driscoll interjected frowning.

He lowered the hand which held the letter, and was about to speak.

"Finish it first," Maurice said.

"I am informed from a reliable source that during my recent unavoidable absences from the parish, my school at Bourneen has been used for purposes not sanctioned by the Board's rules, and for which I gave no permission. Let this never occur again.

"JAMES MAHON, P.P.,
"Manager."

"My school!" Maurice said bitterly.

"Don't take it to heart, boy," Driscoll said gently, folding the letter with deliberation and replacing it in the envelope. "It's just the same as if it is his school as far as you're concerned. Let us see, now. It's a mild letter enough for him. That last bit is about the singing and dancing practices for the Feis likely. Miss Devoy wouldn't be telling——"

"She wouldn't," Maurice said emphatically.

"That's true for you. She's a decent poor slob. It's Matsey's blabbing, I doubt. Not but the whole parish knew of it all along—and why wouldn't they? That's not the point now—it is what's to be done?"

He walked up and down the path, read the letter again, clasped his hands beneath his coat-tails and seemed to consider thoughtfully the little drain through which the water had now ceased to flow. Maurice gazed at Slieve Mor, puzzling over its changed appearance. He had just come to the decision that some of its beauty had gone because

the rain had dried off the face of the rocks, when Driscoll spoke.

"Of course he hasn't that power over you—in vacation time too. Still it might be better——"

"I'm going to the Feis," Maurice said, closing his lips firmly.

"Don't put that jaw on you now, there's a good gossoon," Driscoll said, taking his arm affectionately. "He's an obstinate man, and a bitter one, I won't be denying. He made the mistake early in life of thinking he was God Almighty Himself—only 'twas a queer sort of God he set before himself as a model, without any heart or softness in Him."

He paused and looked at Slieve Mor for a few minutes, while Maurice methodically kicked loose stones off the path into the drain.

"Don't give him the chance of breaking you, Maurice, agra. Stay at home here quietly with me, and we'll have a fine walk up to the top of Slieve Mor, if my old legs can carry me that far."

Maurice looked tenderly at the old man, whose eyes expressed the pathetic anxiety of an affectionate dog. Deeply shaken, he said, "I'd like to please you."

Driscoll's face lighted up with hope. "God bless——"

"No," Maurice said, stopping again. "I can't in this—I'll go."

The old man's face fell.

"What can he do to me after all?" Maurice added, laughing with some bravado. "He can't dismiss me for this."

"If one handle fails, he's sure to turn another—and another," Driscoll said drearily.

"Bullies are always cowards," Maurice said lightly.

Driscoll shook his head. "He's no coward whatever else he is. He's too deep a problem for me, that same man, but I like to give him his due. No matter how wrong he is he's always able to persuade himself that he's in the right, and he'd make his way to the gates of hell itself to carry out his will, at the cost of many a fall to himself too."

"What a man to have power!"

"That's the evil. But then he has it, you see," Driscoll said with a sigh. "There now, if I wasn't forgetting about the drain. Don't speak another word till we have it done. Then I'll abide by what you say, and I won't push agin you any more," and he looked at Maurice appealingly.

They worked silently, Driscoll starting from the water-barrel, Maurice from the gate. He tried to see the matter with Driscoll's eyes. The fresh fragrance of the garden distracted him, and the soothing notes of a solitary blackbird in the hedge. There was nothing to fear. It was Driscoll's love for him that made the old master afraid. Besides—some latent savage feeling took hold of him and he pounded the gravel into place with unnecessary force. He had always resented the power that Father James exercised over him. He had submitted and felt less of a man for it. . . .

His spade touched Driscoll's. He looked up with a start and read a question in the old man's eyes. He had not even tried to come to a decision, but he said firmly—

"It would be selling my soul if I gave in—I'll go." Then he added with a short laugh, "The children'll be there in any case. I can't call them

back now. I might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb."

This sounded to him as a mere subterfuge. He blushed and stammered, "That's only pretence. I wouldn't call them back if they were standing at the gate there. And I'd go if they all stopped at home. You'll forgive me for not giving in to you, master?"

Driscoll did not lift his eyes for some seconds. There was a smile in them when he straightened himself and said—

"Our own little light is the only one we have to go by in the end. God send you won't sup sorrow for doing what's right. Let us wash our hands now and be off."

Maurice weakened in his resolution. He felt as if he could give all he had in the world to say "I'll stay." His lips formed the words ten times as he washed, but he couldn't utter them. He lagged behind Driscoll as, stout blackthorns in hand, they walked up the village street. When they had passed the parochial house he hurried abreast and said—

"On second thoughts——"

"Don't heed them, agra. There are times when they're of some use, and times when they're no good at all. Did I ever tell you the story of how Shawn Oge O'Grady, the greatest of the O'Gradys that ever lived in Durrisk, came by the land? I didn't. Well, it's a proof, if there ever was one, that a man is often the best judge in his own cause—though he doesn't always act on the judgment, more's the pity—and is as likely to see right first as last."

The story was never finished. It had hardly begun when interruptions began. Teighe Donlon's

two little girls, in white dresses and blue sashes, blue ribbons in their straw hats, emerged from a lane on their way to the Feis. Driscoll stopped and spoke to them. Were they going all alone? No; they were getting a seat in the Hinnisseys' cart. Their father and mother had to go early to Liscannow for the market, but their mother'd strive to meet them on the bridge outside the town; and if she didn't, Jack Hinnissey'd see them safe. "Lord bless my soul," Driscoll said, mopping his brow as he walked on after presenting them each with a penny, "they know their way round now the minute they leave the cradle." Carts trundled along noisily and invariably slackened pace as they came abreast. "Won't ye have a lift, master? There's room enough for the two of ye and welcome." And Driscoll would wave his stick in mock horror. "Is it putting a slight on my old legs you are, Jamesey," (or Pat, or Jack), "thinking they're not able to carry me over a few miles of road to Liscannow." Then a hearty laugh as the horse was urged forward, and the cheery retort, "Faith, it's many a mile they'll carry you yet, master, before they give in."

The cathedral clock was striking eleven as they crossed the bridge into the town. The heavy rain had swept the roads clean and a genial sun had almost dried them. But the river, browned by bog water, still gave sullen evidence of the storm. Cocks of hay, loose planks, a hen-coop floating rapidly down mid-stream, showed that the low-lying inches higher up the river were flooded. A boatman freeing the narrow arches of the bridge from the débris with a long gaff, said "it was only a spatter of rain that had no harm in it except to clear out Patsey Lucey's bawn. As for the hen-coop, it was

for certain the one Patsey discarded long ago and was thinking of making firing of only he doubted if it was fit for that same."

This remark made Maurice scan the road.

"I wonder if she's come in yet," he said, his eyes wandering over the stragglers on the bridge.

"She—she!" Driscoll said, walking on. "One'd think there was only one female in the world. It's the great pity that the decorations all got spoiled by the rain," he added, pointing to an announcement of the Feis that spanned the street. The calico was twisted and discoloured and the green lettering had run. The rope had sagged in the middle. A few green flags hung limp and forlorn from the windows of a dozen houses.

Maurice hardly noticed the decorations. He looked at them as if he were taking in every kink in the crumpled calico, but he saw only a vague blot against the sky-line. "She mightn't be the only woman in the world," he thought, "but anyway there wasn't another like her." He bumped against a creel of turf slung from the back of an ass wagging his tail gleefully in the centre of the narrow street as he munched hay from a cart heeled up by the pavement.

"The streets are thronged enough, though it's little thought the people are giving to the Feis, I'm afraid. Mind your steps there with that pig," Driscoll said.

Maurice made no effort to pick his way more carefully. He felt himself on the brink of some new discovery about Alice Barton, and he wanted to think out what it was.

An ash plant, waved by an excited seller of calves, flashed in front of his eyes. A basket, from which

two cocks struggled to escape, caught him in the ribs. He followed closely in the path which Driscoll elbowed through the crowd. He was now keenly awake to external impressions, though his mind was vainly trying to bring into consciousness something elusive, vaguely pleasant and disturbing. He searched for it everywhere: in the dark blue hooded cloaks of the women; in the back of a frieze coat still steaming under the hot sun with the vapour of the rain; in the carts that lined the kerbstones; in the loud chaffering over bonhams and calves and hay; in the friendly salutations in Irish and English that greeted him as he met some Bourneen neighbours.

"Ye're in for some teachers' meeting, I doubt?" Mike Blake said.

"No; the Feis."

"Oh, that!" Mike said, his tone and his shoulders uniting in the expression of a fine shade of contemptuous indifference. "You'll likely find that fool of a Tom and his wife there. They skedaddled off an hour ago, and I wanting him here to help in selling the hay."

And then Maurice knew. He loved Alice as Tom loved Minnie. The blood raced through his veins. The sun suddenly seemed to have become hotter. His forehead burned with a prickly heat. They had passed through the crowded Bridge Street and as they walked abreast through an unfrequented side street Driscoll talked. Maurice did not listen. A vaguely heard voice sounded as a distant harmonic to his own thought. Of course he had loved her all along. All his life it seemed. Certainly at Tom's wedding, he said to himself, with a frown at a lurid pile of shirting and pink

flannelette on the pavement at the corner of the Main Street.

Here Driscoll went ahead. There were fewer carts but the front of the pavement on both sides was lined with the stock of the shops behind: drapery, boots, ironmongery. Itinerant booths extended far out into the road. Family groups, having sold in Bridge Street, were making leisurely inspection of wares preparatory to driving a hard bargain. Children gazed in rapt absorption at a stall laden with pink sugar-stick and gingerbread.

"One would think you never saw a market in Liscannow before. You're not heeding a word I say," Driscoll said impatiently.

Maurice laughed happily. He had just decided that he loved her that first moment at the Reardons', when all he had seen of her was a gleam of gold in her hair in the candle light.

"I see a lot of people wearing Gaelic League badges," he said, grasping at a topic suggested by a passing group.

"It's only selling and buying is occupying the thoughts of most of the people," Driscoll said, shaking his head sadly.

Maurice vehemently denied this. "They have the roots of a great ideal in them, and they have warm hearts." He went on painting a vision of the golden age that was surely coming. He saw all the colour and freshness of the morning in the dull glare of the mid-day sun. The dingy houses, with their dirty chocolate and yellow-green washed fronts, were palaces of art clad in the most delicate hues of the rainbow. . . .

He stopped suddenly as they turned the corner of the lane leading to the disused military barracks

in which the Feis was to be held. In front of the gate Alice Barton was bent slightly forward, knotting a blue bow in a child's hair. He blushed. The end of a sentence trailed off in a stammer. He glanced at Driscoll, but he, too, had seen Alice and was hurrying forward. At the sound of his footsteps she looked up with a smile. She finished the bow with deft fingers, wiped away the remains of tears from the child's smiling face and holding her at an arm's length said solemnly—

“Not another tear, Mary. There's Master Driscoll! and he's jealous that no Bourneen child has as beautiful a bow as that. She's from Drumquin,” she added, turning to Driscoll. “I'm not at all sure that I don't hope the Drumquin girls will get the prize for singing.”

“You're only a turncoat,” Driscoll said, shaking his finger.

“Will I sing my piece for you, Miss Alice?” the child said eagerly.

“Bourneen shows no such devotion—you see how my heart is torn,” Alice said with a twinkle. She patted the child's shoulder and walked with her into the barrack yard.

To Maurice she seemed some unapproachable divinity. He had stood by tongue-tied, hardly daring to look at her, and he felt relieved when she turned away. Her smiles even had a detached expression. He was mad to think that he loved her. He didn't care for her in the least, he almost said with his lips. Some pulse in his forehead throbbed and seemed to beat a refrain against the drum of his ear, “That's a lie, that's a lie.”

Father Malone came into the yard wheeling a bicycle.

"This is pretty bad, Maurice," he said, with a serious face.

Maurice started, his face as red as a peony. Had the priest read the loud whisper, "I love her, I love her," which his heart was pulsing through his body? He muttered something incoherently.

"The big man saw yourself and Driscoll pass by. He's in a dreadful rage. There's no knowing what he won't do. I tried to calm him, but I only made him worse."

Maurice laughed. "I thought it was something serious," he said, and he laughed again boyishly.

Father Malone looked at him in surprise. "His only doubt when I left him was whether he'd dismiss you at once or give you three months' notice," he said hesitatingly.

"Oh, he'll cool down," Maurice said indifferently.

Father Malone frowned thoughtfully, then smiled. "Maybe you know best how to take him?"

It was only when Father Malone had passed into the drill hall that Maurice realized what the priest had said. It worried him for a moment, but he soon put all thought of Father Mahon aside. A group of his school children clamoured for attention. When the Feis began at twelve he was busy as steward and examiner.

The little hall was crowded. "There must be five or six hundred here," Maurice said enthusiastically, meeting Driscoll as they moved about finding seats for late comers.

"Aye, and as many thousands outside that are jeering at it—but it's great anyway, we're making headway."

Green-ribboned boys and blue-ribboned girls filled most of the seats. But all ages were represented. A tottering old man held an infant in his palsied arms and murmured, "The sound of the Irish will loosen his tongue." Young men made room for young women in seats already packed tight.

Some time during each competition, whether it was dancing, singing, story-telling, fiddling or piping, Maurice's eyes unconsciously sought Alice ; but she seemed to think of nothing but the competitor of the moment. She had no heart, he said, and then he remembered a dozen instances to the contrary. She did not care for him anyway. This he could not rebut, and found a pleasant satisfaction in his misery.

CHAPTER XII

AT the close of a spirited contest in story telling between an old woman of seventy and a boy of ten, the Feis began to drag. In a quiet corner, Mrs. Tom Blake, carefully secured from crushing by her husband's immovable bulk, had gone peacefully to sleep. Children wandered about listlessly with hair and ribbons awry, or nodded restlessly in the seats. A few priests in the front bench, visitors to Liscannow for the bathing, consulted their watches uneasily every few minutes. Father Delahunty, who had just confided to a neighbour, in a whisper audible throughout the hall, that the affair was damn dull, and that he would not have come next or near it, only he wanted to please his curate, Cassidy, who had a bee in his bonnet over that same Irish, openly yawned. The floor was strewn with skins of oranges, loose papers, and empty paper bags that had once held sweets or biscuits. The air was heavy and stuffy. The very flags on the walls had begun to droop. The Bourneen children, having won the prize for part-singing, were sent home by Father Malone under escort of Mrs. Hinnissey. A flat-chested spinster, who proclaimed that she had the best song in the whole world inside her, droned an interminable hackneyed folk song from the back of her throat in the tone of a wheezy bag-pipes. The judges tried to stop her, but she waved them aside imperiously. A

contest of fiddlers awoke the audience again. Jim Mescall furnished a running sarcastic commentary on the efforts of his rivals. When awarded the prize, he said a good fiddle was a waste in a company of the kind—he could have beaten the lot of them on an old Day & Martin blacking box with a couple of strings of cat-gut on it that he had by him at home.

“The best of it is over,” Maurice said to Alice. “You must be worn out. Won’t you come with the master and myself and have a cup of tea in a little shop round the corner?”

“It was glorious,” she said, her eyes glowing. “Are you sure we shan’t miss anything?” She looked around hesitatingly.

A priest entered the hall hurriedly and whispered to Father Delahunty. After a few seconds he beckoned to Father Malone, who came down from the platform. They were soon joined by all the other priests. Standing in a group in front of the platform, they carried on an animated whispered conversation. The whole audience watched them curiously. Father Malone went back to the platform and whispered to Driscoll.

“It’s over in any case,” Driscoll said aloud.

“The priests are keen on it,” Father Malone said doubtfully.

Driscoll consulted a few members of the committee. After some shaking of heads the secretary came to the front of the platform and announced—

“Fortunately the Feis is nearly over. But at the request of the clergy the committee is glad to finish it at once out of respect to the Bishop of Droomeen, the news of whose death has just come. I also propose a vote of condolence with our own beloved

bishop, of whose close connection with that ancient diocese we are all aware, in his deep affliction."

"Tra-la," Father Delahunty said, winking at the ceiling.

"Was the Bishop of Droomeen a great friend of the movement?" Alice asked Maurice.

"He did his best to kill it."

A slight frown puckered her brow. "And Dr. Hannigan?"

Maurice shrugged his shoulders. "He sits tight. Neither for nor against—in public. I'm told he doesn't like it. That speech is what McBride, the secretary, calls policy."

"I'd prefer straightness."

"You would," Maurice said, thinking only of the glow in her eyes that brought out the gold flecks in the brown of the irises. "McBride would say that the bishops are very powerful, and that we ought to do our best to propitiate them," he added, after a pause, with a short laugh.

"Open enemies are better than doubtful friends," she said sententiously. She smiled at Driscoll, who was coming towards them. "Being a Protestant, I suppose I oughtn't say anything," she added, half to herself.

"What nonsense! You——" Maurice began; but Driscoll interrupted—

"Now we can have tea, Miss Barton, and we'll see you home after. How did you like it?"

"It dragged out a bit at the end, but it was fine."

As the audience filed out of the hall, Maurice watched her talking enthusiastically with Driscoll. "What had her Protestantism to do with it?" he asked himself, with a questioning frown.

Father Malone drew him aside. "It's an ill

wind that blows nobody good," he whispered. "That old bishop's death saves you from Father Mahon. He won't want any row on his hands now for a couple of months with a mitre in the balance. Though God help you afterwards if things go wrong with his plans. I can't stay now, as I'm dining with the priests. Come in to-night and have a chat."

"Come along, Maurice," Driscoll called out.

At tea in the back room of Miss Doolan's cake shop, an old rhyme, often flung at the Protestants attending Bourneen school in his childhood, kept running through his mind—

"Proddy, Woddy, green guts,
Never says a prayer.
Catch him by the hind leg
And fling him down the stair."

He remembered Driscoll's anger on hearing it once—one of the few times he had ever seen the old man angry, he thought, as he looked at his smiling, eager face. He wondered if these rhymes were ever sung now. Alice was engaged in a vigorous argument with Driscoll. She appealed to Maurice laughingly to decide some point. He smiled back, but his thoughts played with her religion. She and Driscoll again talked with animation, while Maurice picked the raisins out of one of Miss Doolan's Bath buns—a Bath bun only in name. She wasn't in the least like what he had believed of Protestants when he was a child, he thought, eating a raisin appreciatively. All Protestants were black, scowling people, with a look in their eyes of the hell to which they were certainly speeding. While she—he chuckled softly. The conversation between his companions had become more serious. He listened.

"No matter what you say, there is a feeling against us, Mr. Driscoll," Alice said.

"In the North, maybe, not here. Have we any feeling against Protestants, Maurice?"

"No," Maurice said emphatically.

"I didn't think you or Mr. Blake had. I'd love to believe that no one had—but—but—Father Mahon looks so queerly at me when he passes me on the road. He has never spoken to me since I came into his parish."

"I wouldn't make much of that," Driscoll said uneasily. "It's often and often he gave me that same look, and I a Catholic. There's Father Malone now," he added, brightening, "he wouldn't say a hard word against any one in the world, Turk, Jew, or Atheist, let alone Protestants."

"Even Uncle John says that he's a Christian out of the gospels," she said smiling.

"The people seem to have no ill-feeling," she continued, pursuing her own train of thought. "All the same, there is something—I can't explain it—some feeling that I am different and wrong, and——" she hesitated. Maurice said—

"It's only the memory of old prejudices. I had them myself when I was a boy," he added, laughing. "They don't mean anything now."

"I hope not," she said, looking at him thoughtfully. "I've said as much myself to Uncle John, but he only shakes his head and says that the priests could arouse bad feeling any day—perhaps I ought not to have said that, but you both know him? He'd say the same to you."

"John Crawford always sees the black side of things," Driscoll said with a shrug. "Will we be making a start?"

"Priests haven't as much power nowadays as Protestants seem to think," Maurice said lightly, as they rose.

"I don't know how I got on this subject—with Catholics too," Alice said apologetically. "Before we go home you must show me the town, Mr. Driscoll. You've often promised, and I've never really seen it."

The late afternoon sun transfigured the mean streets. The motley coloured houses were warm in tone. Windows flamed in gold. A tinman's stall flashed silver. The long shadows against the bronzed dust of the road had a violet tinge. A row of dirty pink houses on the quay glowed a rich crimson on the glassy surface of the basin. Driscoll had stories and legends of all the sights—the wall which only the eye of faith could see; the castle, beside which once stood the principal gate; the ruined Dominican priory; the Celtic cross in the market square, its carved figures almost obliterated by time, an arm shattered, so the story ran, by one of Cromwell's cannon balls; and, near by, the limpid well of St. Brigid in which the variegated rag-offerings on an overhanging tree were reflected vividly.

"The sun is kind to Liscannow," Alice said, as they passed through a squalid street of thatched houses on their way to the bridge, her eyes on the flaming poppies and golden rag-weed that grew luxuriantly on the decaying roofs.

"It has its work cut out for it," Driscoll said with a sigh. "Not but things are looking up. They've a new cloth factory and the fishing is better since they built the new quay."

"And these pigsties?"

"Well! you know Rome wasn't built in a day," he said whimsically.

She laughed. "Anyhow, to-day began in a storm and it ends in this," she said, standing on the bridge and pointing to the sunset. At the bar the river broke into silver foam. The peak of Slieve Mor was already clad in purple, but the slate roofs of Liscannow gleamed a red gold.

"God send it's a good omen," Driscoll said reverently.

"Amen," Maurice said, watching the sunset in Alice's glowing face.

"I'll do anything in reason but I won't go home," a voice said behind them.

They turned. A man, half drunk, seated in an ass cart was pulling back the reins with all his strength, while a weary looking woman tried vainly to urge the ass forward.

Alice gave a troubled look at Driscoll.

"Even that kind of thing is better than it used to be. That's the first I've seen to-day," he said sadly.

He spoke gently to the man, who said in a drunken whisper—

"She has a drop taken, the poor thing. It easy goes to her head. Get out of the ass's way, woman," he added loudly to his wife, "and don't be pitting main strength and ignorance agin me, and I wanting to get home."

She let go the winkers, gave Driscoll a tired, grateful look, and hung on to the tail of the cart as her husband whipped the ass across the bridge.

"It's as much want of food as the drink," Driscoll said meditatively. "We're backward in many ways, even as regards our proper eating—

likely enough he never ate a bite since he left home early and got drenched on top of it. All the same, them Liscannow public houses are a caution."

"There's a lot to be done yet," Alice said.

As they turned the corner at the far end of the bridge, a trap approached rapidly along the Bourneen road.

"It's Father Mahon," Driscoll said, as the last rays of the sun caught the nap on the silk hat of the driver. "Well, well, well, but this is a misfortune."

"It's a wonderful day," the priest said cheerfully, waving his whip as he passed.

Driscoll stood and stared after him with open mouth. "Well, now, if he's not the greatest wonder in it himself. In the best of tempers, too, after all that's passed."

"There's a dead bishop in front of him," Maurice said bitterly, with a frown.

"Now, Maurice, the vexation of the morning is on you still—he might be regretting his part in it. He had all the looks of it anyway," Driscoll said, walking on.

Alice looked at them curiously but did not speak. Maurice shrugged his shoulders. His eyes roamed over the landscape in front, and the ever changing colour of the sky. The only signs of the storm that remained were the fresher green on the rain-swept hedgerows and a quickened scent from a field of clover in flower.

"You'll be with us a good while yet," Driscoll said to Alice, breaking the silence as they passed out of the dusk of Durrisk wood.

"Three months at the longest."

They kept up a brisk duologue till they reached the stile where the short cut to Crawford's house

branched off from the main road. Maurice listened intently. He heard every word—Driscoll's expressions of regret, his praise of her work, a review of all the activities of the parish—but always, at the end of every sentence of hers, like the harsh roar of the ground swell on the Liscannow beach in a storm, the phrase "three months at the longest" battered against his ears. One lobe of his brain registered their talk of the Gaelic League, of folk-songs and folk-tunes, of Jim Mescall's music, of agricultural banks, of improved farming, of some new heaven that was opening over the country: the other was recording obscurely some desperate struggle of his among the breakers, in which he strove vainly to grasp some vague object that was ever eluding him with each receding wave.

"Uncle John and Aunt Ruth will miss me—I think," she said, as they stood in front of the stile.

"We'll all miss you—won't we, Maurice?" Driscoll said.

Her hand was stretched out. Maurice took it with a grasp that made her wince. This was what he was groping after all the time, he thought, and he crushed it relentlessly. He had got her at last and he would never let her go. Her fingers felt so small and cool. She gave a little gasp and her eyes had a shade of apprehension. He blushed and dropped her hand suddenly.

"You might see her as far as the door," Driscoll said.

"Not another step," she said, and she laughed softly to herself as she mounted the stile.

Maurice gazed after her as she tripped along the path.

"Come along. It's getting late," Driscoll said.

"What's come over your tongue at all, and you without a word out of you since we left Liscannow? That'd be the very girl for you now to marry, only it's the pity of the world she's a Protestant."

"What would that matter?" Maurice said, checking a laugh.

Driscoll peered at him in the fading twilight. Maurice blushed hotly and laughed again nervously.

"Surely to God you're not thinking of it?" Driscoll said anxiously.

"I wish I knew if she'd have me."

"Have you lost your senses, man?" Driscoll said, catching Maurice's arm and shaking it violently.

"I might—or have found them," Maurice said doggedly.

They both stopped and stood facing each other in the middle of the road. A cart passed and separated them.

"Bedad, Master Driscoll, from the stand of you I thought you were going to wallop him," the driver said cheerfully.

Driscoll gave a curt "good night," and rejoined Maurice as the cart lumbered on.

"How long have you been thinking of this?"

"It feels like all my life—it was back at the stile there."

"If that's all," with a sigh that mingled relief with anxiety, "let us be stepping on, and I might put some sense into you before we get to Bourneen."

Maurice waited for Driscoll to speak, but the old man walked on in silence, his stick under his coat tails, the forefinger of his left hand making circles in the air, a trick of his when worried.

"Well?" Maurice said impatiently.

"Can't you see it yourself?"

"I see enough, but nothing to stop me if she'll only face it with me."

"God send *her* the sense then. Thank God women are more clear-sighted than men when there's foolishness of the heart about."

His face brightened and he struck his iron-bound stick with a sharp thud on the road. "Maybe, she'd turn a Catholic?" he said. "That'd settle everything."

The suggestion gave Maurice a momentary relief from a vague fear that was oppressing him. He pondered it awhile, then shook his head.

"She wouldn't—nor would I ask her. What'd you think of her if she asked me to become a Protestant?"

Driscoll's face had grown despondent even before Maurice spoke. The gloom deepened on it as he said reluctantly—

"I knew it before I had the words out of my mouth. She's not the stamp of woman to play pitch and toss with her religion—and I'd think little of her if she was. But that only makes your duty all the clearer," he added, after a pause. "You must never open your lips to the girl in the matter."

"Why?"

"Why? For ten whys and every one of 'em sinking you deeper into the bog. You jumped into the frying-pan with the big man this morning—you might get out of that and keep your school. But do you want to turn a somersault right into the middle of the fire from where there'd be no saving you?"

The old man spoke excitedly. His finger made rapid revolutions.

"How could you ask her to marry you without a ha'penny or the way of earning it. What would ye live on?"

"The school isn't much, of course, for a girl like her, and she used to a lot of things I couldn't give her—but it's enough to live on," Maurice said doubtfully.

"You'd never darken the door of Bourneen school again if you married a Protestant wife. You'd get the sack without a day's notice. The whole world knows Father James hates Protestants like poison and mixed marriages like hell itself, God forgive me."

"I could get another school," Maurice said aggressively.

"From a priest-manager! And Father James to give you a character! You'd travel through the five provinces and wear the soles off your feet and be as far from getting a school as when you started. Besides—and this is the one gleam of hope I see in the whole business—you can't get married to a Protestant without a dispensation, and Father Mahon'll take good care that you'll never get one."

"He got one for Mr. O'Grady of Durrisk."

Driscoll let his arm fall helplessly.

"The state you're in has made you lose your wits entirely," he said. "As if the likes of Mr. O'Grady was any pattern for the likes of us in the eyes of the clergy. You haven't Durrisk Manor and more thousands a year than there's days in the week. And Father James's principles couldn't be shook by anything he'd expect out of you. Besides, even if you could pay him well itself for his trouble,

he'd never suffer a schoolmaster to have a Protestant wife."

"The bishop might give the dispensation over Father Mahon's head—he has the name of being a just man," Maurice said, with the despair of a drowning man grasping at a straw.

"Why would he go out of his way to help you agin Father Mahon? Don't be expecting too much out of life, agra, nor out of the clergy either. They——"

He walked along in silence. Maurice regarded the last pearly light of the sun with curious interest. An opaque cloud was closing in on a silver patch at the zenith, while further east a few faint grey clouds edged with purple were fading into the night. It was like his own life, he felt, on which darkness was gathering. Then, over his left shoulder, he saw the crescent moon. "This is luck," he said under his breath, with a thrill of joy. Unconsciously he repeated an old rhyme of his childhood—

"I see the new moon ;
The new moon sees me ;
God bless the new moon ;
God bless me,"

turning a circle three times. When he noticed what he had done he laughed at himself. But the feeling of depression had passed away.

"There may be some truth in an old pistorogue after all. I'll not believe but there's some way out of this trouble," he said with a new feeling of hope.

"By putting it out of your head for good and all," Driscoll said emphatically.

"It's gone deeper than the head. I can't pitch out of me every drop of blood that's throbbing in

my body. I'm talking to you now," Maurice said, with a glad laugh, "but I can't put into words what I feel. I see it up there," he added, gazing meditatively at the stars, now glimmering brighter than the thin pale curve of moon, "and I feel it in the scent of the hedges, and I hear it this very minute in the lowing of Teigue Donlon's cows up the lane there—aye in the tapping of your old stick against the road. And it's coming up out of the earth to the sound of my own feet. Put it out of my head, indeed! Why, for any power I have over it, I feel like I did the day I was caught out in the bay in a squall, and I alone in a little punt. But there is no fear on me, 'only joy. My thoughts are like that little kippeen of a boat, dashed about by the big waves within me, and they singing sweeter than any tune Jim Mescall at his best ever drew out of the fiddle. I feel——"

"Aye, I remember what it feels like when it takes a man bad," Driscoll said with a sigh. "Here we are at the gate. Not another word out of you about it to-night, or I might be forgetting my own sense and be bolstering you up in your foolishness."

"I think I'll walk east a bit. Somehow, I don't feel like being cooped up in the house."

"Do then. It might cool you."

The old man walked up the path with head bent. He half turned the key in the lock, left it there, and hastening back to the gate called after Maurice.

"I don't draw back a word of what I said," he said, when Maurice returned. "There was sound sense and reason in it. Give heed to it, boy, and don't do anything rash." He paused hesitatingly, turned on his heel, walked away a few steps, came back. "If the world was only ruled by the heart,"

he said, looking beyond Maurice,—“and it ought to be by rights—there wouldn’t be much trouble in it. My mind is pulling me one way and my heart another till I’m torn in two over you. And if all was known, maybe God has more to do with the heart than the head. After all,” he continued, in a hesitating whisper, as if he were trying to read his words in the distant stars, “it’s little we know of the sap that pushes out the leaves in the spring and gives all their glory to the flowers. The best tulip I ever grew was from a bulb I cast away as useless on the midden. With the best of intentions the wisdom of the oldest of us is only foolishness.” His voice trailed off in a murmur. He caught Maurice’s sleeve. “I’m only wandering. I came after you to say one thing and I’m saying another. All I want to say to you now, and it wasn’t what came into my head as I turned the key, is that I’d like to give you the moon beyond if you had your heart set on it.”

Maurice watched him walk up the path again, open the door, strike a match, and light the lamp on the sill of the uncurtained window. There was a strained, sad look in his face as he stood for a moment in the glow of the lamp fumbling with the cord of the blind. He pulled it down slowly. Maurice watched it descend with a growing depression. After a while the lamp was moved. He saw Driscoll’s shadow on the blind in profile—his shoulders stooped and what seemed an outline of pain in the whole figure. A hand stretched out and made circles with the forefinger.

Maurice clicked the latch of the gate, half opened it, closed it again and walked down the hill. He shivered a little, and put out his hand as if to

feel the air. The master was worried, he thought. How was it that he was so chilled when the air felt warm? He quickened his pace. He could not get away from that look on Driscoll's face. What had caused it? Where was that background of feeling that swayed his thoughts with all its colour and music a few minutes ago? Gone. His thoughts were clear enough now. And cold, thin, miserable thoughts they were, he laughed grimly. Paining the old man on the head of Alice Barton—on plans for marrying her, and she never having given him even a look to show that she cared a pin for him. Driscoll was right. Supposing she cared for him, and it was a ridiculous supposition, he could not marry her. He waded through the pool in the hollow without noticing it; though, for a few minutes afterwards, he was fascinated by the squishing of the water in his boots as he walked. He couldn't give up Bourneen. His work had meant more to him for the last few months than ever before—he had done more too. And if he gave it up, would he be any nearer to her? There was nothing for it but to put her out of his head. And there was Driscoll, worried. A thought pointed an accusing finger at Alice Barton. He put this aside as unfair. She wasn't to blame. . . . He tried to think of the bank, of new plans for the school for the winter. He remembered Father Mahon's letter of the morning. He might have to leave in any case. He almost stepped into another pool in a hollow. He turned back. His thoughts wandered, with his eyes, to a pile of broken stones on the side of the road. A stone-breaker had a fine free life and could marry whom he willed: maybe he couldn't: Father Mahon's long arm might

stretch out, too, between him and his heart's desire. A row of poplars fronting a farmhouse rustled in an almost imperceptible wind. Maurice sniffed the salt odour of the sea in the warm air, and strained his ears to catch what he thought at first was the roar of breakers on the distant beach, but which proved to be the rumble of an approaching cart. He stepped aside to let it pass. A woman seated on the backboard, laid across the middle of the cart, a vague outline of gracious curves against the starlight, reminded him of Alice Barton. Then he saw her in everything, in the shimmering glory of the milky way, between the silver horns of the vanishing moon, in every bush that lined the white road in front—a long procession of beautiful women, all alike and all different in the infinite variety of her changing face. Again his thoughts were mere driftwood floating aimlessly on the surface of an unfathomable deep. His fears were there, too, wide eyed, and his difficulties, but nothing mattered, only Alice—not the school, not the bank, not the whole world beside. . . .

CHAPTER XIII

THIS time he saw the water in the hollow. He stood on the brink. He was already wet, so he might as well walk through it, he thought. He remembered that he had promised to call on Father Malone, and crept cautiously along the top of the ditch, worn into a narrow path by many feet during previous floods. He jumped on to the dry road, past the water, and felt the legs of his trousers. They were fairly dry, and would not drip in the priest's parlour. As he mounted the hill his relation to Alice Barton became clearer. It was just as inevitable that he should marry her, if he could, as that he had to get past the pool in order to reach home. He saw all the difficulties now as clearly as Driscoll saw them. They were as real as the water in the hollow, and not to be overcome so easily. Still there might be a way out. He laughed at himself for taking it for granted that she loved him and would marry him. His reason said, "You are a fool, she doesn't love you, she is as far above you as the stars." But a hundred pent-up feelings united in his heart, and surged through him with a sound in his ears like the waterfall under the spur of Slieve Mor. There were no articulate words, but something stronger than words, stilling the voice of doubt and protest—an emotion that lifted him to the stars and made them stepping-stones for his feet, giving

his soul the mastery of the world. . . . He leant, chilled, against the gate of Driscoll's cottage. The light still shone through the holland blind. The shadow of the master's head, his spectacles low down on his nose, made a quaint pattern. The clock struck the half-hour. Maurice looked at his watch. What had come over him ? he asked himself uneasily, as he tried to read the time in the dim light. Half-past ten. It was not yet too late to call on the priest, who was a late goer to bed. He felt hungry and cold. He had eaten nothing since breakfast, except the light tea at Liscannow. Perhaps that was why he felt so queer. His damp stockings pricked his feet. It was madness to think because he loved Alice that she loved him ! This thought sobered him. He stamped his feet on the road, half to warm them, half to emphasize his own foolishness, as he walked to the priest's house. All the same, he loved her.

Maria opened the door.

"The priest is expecting you this hour back," she said gruffly.

"I went for a long walk, and forgot the time."

She looked at his boots, caked in dry mud, and at the limp, wrinkled trouser legs. She leant down and passed her hand over them.

"Catching your death you'll be. On the road to Liscoff you were, and driving headlong through the mud and water. You have no more sense than the priest himself, and that's saying a good deal."

She lit a candle on the hall table, and opened the door of the priest's bedroom.

"In here you go," she said, leading the way, "and I'll give you some dry things."

He protested feebly, but followed her.

"There now," she said, making a move to leave, "change into them. It's well there's any left but what's on his back, and only for me there wouldn't. I'll be gone to my bed before you go, but you'll find your own things here, with the clauber off them and dried, by the time ye give up your foolish talking. It's peaky enough you're looking," she added, lingering by the door. "And why wouldn't you? Two men living beyond there without a woman to look after ye, only Bessy Reilly, and she not half doing it, and fooling ye to your teeth. I'll bring you in a hot drink to put some life in you. If what Matsey Boylan told me is true, we ought all be in the best of spirits—he heard it, he said, from the clerk of the parish within at Liscannow. I had it on the tip of my tongue to ask Father Malone himself when he came back, but I remembered in time that he put me under a vow not to mention Father Mahon to him—the poor, innocent young priest thinks that'll keep me from giving the big man his due. And it not a real promise either, except in Father Ned's own mind, and me only nodding my head to save words. But I'm keeping you. They say there's a chance of the big man being made a bishop—and a good riddance it'd be," she wound up, slamming the door.

"I'm glad Maria took you in hand," Father Malone said, stopping Maurice's apology as he entered the sitting-room. "She'll put a bib on me and feed me next. Mum!" he added, with the look of a naughty child, as she bounced into the room with a tray on which were two steaming cups of cocoa, a loaf of bread, and some butter.

"There, now, take that before ye stifle yourselves in smoke," she said crossly.

Maurice ate slice after slice of thick bread and butter.

"I've nearly finished the loaf," he said ruefully, as he got up from the table and sat in an armchair in front of the empty grate.

"It was a great day," Father Malone said, handing him a tobacco jar.

"It was."

"We owe a great deal to Miss Barton."

"We do."

They filled and lighted their pipes, and discussed the Feis desultorily.

"Did you pick up any tale for your collection? There were a couple that were new to me."

Maurice laughed. "I wasn't heeding much to-day. But the master said he'd be on the look-out."

"You're not growing cold on it?" the priest asked anxiously.

"I was having a day off," Maurice said lamely. "Did I tell you that that new publisher in Dublin has taken the book?"

"That's the best news I heard to-day," the priest said heartily. "I suppose this trouble with Father James put it out of your head?"

"I suppose so—that, and one thing and another," Maurice said, picking busily at his pipe, which seemed to be drawing freely.

"A great thing about these new movements is that they're drawing Protestants and Catholics together," he added irrelevantly.

Father Malone watched a ring of smoke ascending in a widening circle to the ceiling.

"It wasn't before it was time," he said thoughtfully.

"There was a fair sprinkling of the clergy at the Feis to-day. That's a good sign."

"Most of them were only killing a day of their vacation. They thought it dull enough."

"They can't have much heart in it, then. Though I was talking to a few young priests, and they were as keen as could be."

"We start young all right. The difficulty is to keep it up. Sitting here alone at night I often get afraid of myself. I feel it worse after getting back from a big dinner with the priests. They'd throw a wet blanket on our Lord Himself if He opened His lips among them. It's few have His courage to keep on in the face of laughter and sneers. I used not to mind it at first, but I find it telling on me. The Lord only knows what I'll come to myself by the time I get a parish. But I oughtn't to be speaking like this—and to you, too, that has trouble enough of your own."

"You'll be preaching caution next," Maurice said indignantly.

The priest laughed. "I might then. Better men than me come to that. Only to-night the bishop gave me a lecture on wisdom and prudence, and Father James standing by and nodding his head like as if he was a bishop already. Thank God, in my heart I knew it was a counsel of timidity and selfishness. But the atmosphere tells—any day I might be pluming my pet failings as virtues."

"I thought the Church was widening out?"

"It isn't then. It's closing in. It's losing ground, and it knows it, and it's gripping tight what's left. There are some priests even that think it's going about it the wrong way. But they're muzzled and daren't open their lips. Tell me about the

societies—it might put some heart into me again,” emptying his pipe into the grate.

“It’s a bad sign that I see these things at all,” he continued, after a short pause. “A few years ago I didn’t see them, and I worked away without giving any heed to whether there was a stone wall in front of me or not—— But what’s the use in talking? How did them new boats do at the herring fishing?”

After awhile the conversation veered round to the poultry society.

“That girl has a head on her,” Father Malone said, admiringly.

“You don’t mind her being a Protestant?” Maurice asked blushing.

“Why in the world should I?”

“I’m thinking of asking her to marry me.” He had not intended to tell the priest, but the words were spoken before he was fully conscious of them. He watched with curious interest a startled look grow on Father Malone’s face.

“What?”

The priest forgot his pipe. It fell from his opened teeth, scattering the burning tobacco on his soutane and on the rug. He got up hastily, shook out his soutane and trod on a spark.

“You’re not mad, Maurice?” he said with a scared face, taking off his glasses and rubbing them nervously. “It’s imposs——”

“I’ve heard all that from Driscoll. Besides, it’s not impossible. Dispensations are given, why can’t I get one?”

“A schoolmaster! the bad example!”

Maurice made an impatient movement.

“I know there’s a good deal of nonsense in

that," the priest said hastily, "but it's the answer you'd get. If she'd only turn Catholic——"

"If I hear any more of that I'll—I'll break something," Maurice said, starting up.

"Poor fellow—poor fellow," Father Malone said gently.

This irritated Maurice. He strode up and down the room angrily. After three or four turns he said shyly, "Forgive me—I——"

"Nonsense, man. Sit down and have another pipe."

They filled their pipes, lit them, and sat staring at the grate. Maurice drew short jerky puffs. The priest turned the smoke round and round in his mouth and exhaled it in a sort of slow whistle.

"I see no way out of it that won't lose you to the parish and lose you your job as well. Think it over well like a good fellow—there's the girl to consider."

"She's all I will consider——"

The sharp pinge of gravel on the window interrupted him. They both looked towards it.

The handle of a whip, thrust through the opening at the top, moved aside the blind.

"Let me in. I didn't like to knock for fear of Maria's tongue, in case I wakened her out of her beauty sleep," came in Father Delahunty's voice from outside. "I saw the light as I was passing—I won't stay a minute."

At the sitting-room door he stood for a few seconds gazing at Maurice.

"Oh, the schoolmaster!" he said. "Nice work, the curate and the schoolmaster conspiring, I suppose, against the P.P. How are you, Mr. Blake? What's your time, Father Ned? Ten to twelve—"

that gives lashings of time. No cocoa for me, thank you. That's one pull ye schoolmasters have over us, Mr. Blake. Ye can break your fast after twelve with comfort. God help me, I've mass before me in the morning. That'll do, Father Ned—only a thimbleful, and a drop of soda if you have it handy. The horse is all right; I tied him to the gate."

He sat on the edge of a chair in his heavy overcoat and sipped his small helping of whiskey.

"Father James is off to Droomeen to bury the bishop—the sorrow oozing out of him for the poor man that he never laid eyes on, I'm told. He's attending on the lord. Well, well, it's a queer world. There, that's done, and three minutes to spare," putting down his glass on the table. "The lads have already appointed our man to Droomeen," he continued, his eyes gleaming humorously, "and the old man hardly stiff yet. As for this diocese, they've elected half a dozen bishops to it since dinner time. There are several running neck and neck. It ought to make a pretty course."

"Who is your man?" Father Malone said, laughing.

"Do you hear him now, Mr. Blake?" Father Delahunty said, with a shrewd smile. "Wanting to spoil many a good dinner on me. Sorra day between this and the election—if it ever comes off—that I need dine at home if I keep my mouth shut. All parties'll be making up to me. Wild horses wouldn't drag my man out of me till I plump him in the ballot-box."

"I hope we'll get a good man anyway," Father Malone said.

"Amen to that," Delahunty said seriously.

"Though he has as many wins to make as a hound in a big sweepstake," he added grimly. "Here I am, talking away and scandalizing a layman, and I ought to be at home in my bed. And the horse licking the paint off your gate too. Good night, Father Ned. Good night, young man. If ever Father Mahon is holding the leash too tight on you and one of my schools is vacant, you'll have the first refusal of it—if Cassidy'll let me, and he's sure to as you're as mad on the Irish as he is himself, poor gom."

"That might be a way out?" Maurice said hopefully, when Father Delahunty had gone.

"The bishop wouldn't let him. He's a good fellow, but his hands are tied. I couldn't do it myself if I had a school to give."

"Poor schoolmasters!" Maurice said dryly.

The priest bent his head in silence.

Maurice said "Good night" gruffly, but turned back at the door and added: "I'm only a selfish beast worrying you like this."

He changed quickly into his dried clothes. Father Malone saw him out but he could not trust himself to speak. He pressed the priest's hand and tried to look less angry than he felt. When he got home, Driscoll was still up, seated in his armchair, his hands resting on his knees, a book turned back upwards on the table beside him. The kettle was singing on the hob. The table was laid for tea.

"I thought you'd never come," the old man said listlessly.

"I was with Father Malone; I've had food."

"Did you tell him?"

"I did."

"Well?"

"A man that'd be beggared can't well ask a girl to marry him on the strength of it."

Driscoll gave a sigh of relief. "It's cold comfort, but it warms my heart to know you'll give up the idea," he said, but without enthusiasm.

"It's a hellish system that'd crush the life out of a man," Maurice said bitterly.

"A good curse often relieves a man. I never tried it myself, but I've seen it work wonders."

Maurice laughed harshly. He looked at the old man, whose eyes were fixed on the ground. He seemed to have aged years in a few hours. The warm colour of his skin had gone, and his face was pallid and damp. Thick blue veins on the side of his forehead stood out against the light. His fingers and the corners of his lips twitched.

"I'm only thinking of myself all the time," Maurice said impulsively, laying a hand on one of Driscoll's.

Like a child playing "hot-hands" Driscoll lifted his hand and let it drop on Maurice's. A smile, beginning on his lips, slowly lighted up his face.

"It's a common enough symptom of your disease," he said.

"No matter what happens, I'll——"

"You'll go to bed now, in the name of God. I know it might be hard, but try and keep in the one mind for a few hours at any rate."

CHAPTER XIV

MAURICE went to bed but not to sleep. He had a half-waking nightmare in which malign hands stretched him on a gridiron on the peak of Slieve Mor. The flames that surrounded him, instead of being hot, were icy. He started up and found that he had kicked off the bedclothes. The night was warm, but a cold sweat made him shiver. He saw Alice Barton seated on a snow-clad mountain, from which he was separated by a foaming bridgeless torrent. This picture began in some sort of dream, but persisted when he was fully awake. There was no question now, he thought, of his love or hers. If all Driscoll and Father Malone said was true, it was impossible for him to ask her to marry him. It was ridiculous that bread and butter and a roof should be factors in love and marriage, but it seemed they were. The more he thought of her the more important they loomed in his imagination. He should be worse off than the poorest of the shore fishermen. He couldn't drag her down to this grinding poverty. . . .

He plunged into a discussion on school-work with Driscoll when they met at breakfast. He talked against time to keep the old man off the subject that was hammering insistently for expression at the back of his own mind. Long before Driscoll had finished Maurice was out at the garden gate,

his head bare to a brilliant summer sun. But all the vivid colouring of the landscape seemed only a succession of shades of drab. He was just thinking how dreary and miserable everything looked when the postman said—

“It’s a wonderful day that’s in it, glory be to God.”

Maurice shrugged his shoulders with a wry smile, expressive of his thought, “Have it so if you are so blind,” as he was handed two letters, one for Driscoll, one for himself. Driscoll’s was about the registration of the new poultry society he saw from the cover. He hurried in with it, as the old man had been worrying about it.

“It’s all right now,” Driscoll said, as he read. “She——” he stopped short. “It’s all right—all right. What’s that you have there?”

Maurice opened his letter carelessly. He stared at long printed slips.

“It’s the book,” he said in an awe-stricken tone. “The proofs of it at least.”

For an hour they passed them from hand to hand, Driscoll fingering them tenderly, as if they were almost too precious to touch.

“And to think you did that,” he said.

“It is as much yours as mine—more,” Maurice said, and he, too, felt strangely moved by the tawdry, ill-printed sheets.

“It’s you put the English on the tales, and it fits the Irish like a glove. Not but I’m glad I had a hand in it—though I was only an old gramophone at the best.”

Maurice worked at the proofs till Bessy Reilly called him to dinner. All through the meal Driscoll spoke of them.

"It's a great day for Bourneen," he said.

Maurice felt that the proofs were a blessed relief for the vacation. He had worked without thinking of Alice, except for a few bitter moments. There would be more proofs to-morrow, and Driscoll would talk of them. . . .

"I must go down to the shore about the new boat for which they want to borrow," he said.

"Do then, and I'll have another look at them," Driscoll said, his eyes seeking the bundle on the desk. "A mistake or other may have missed your notice."

Somehow the sun had again begun to shine and have warmth, and there was a freshness in the breeze, as Maurice took the shore road. He thought of Alice calmly now. He probably could never marry her, but he could always love her. He would always love her. Filmy clouds of wonderful shades of soft white were close-packed against the blue on the horizon. There was music in the harsh call of a solitary curlew circling over a pool in the bottom, and in the crackling of gorse pods in the hedges. Probably—more likely, certainly, she never gave him a thought. The suffering would be his only. And it was not all suffering. He stood and watched a lark rise as if from the heart of a poppy in the cornfield beyond the low hedge. It never sang at this hour in this month? But it did. And the gorgeous flame of sound, piercing the sky, touched his heart to fire. Sacrifice was the highest love, he thought, with a sigh, and the low murmur of the waves soothed the ache he felt.

He met the fishermen by the unprotected slip—the only harbour for their boats. His business was soon done, but he lingered, watching the nets, a

golden brown against the shingle. The men talked as they worked, preparing for the night fishing.

"It's that same bank has been the blessing," one said. "If we only had a decent boat-slip now, the Strand'd make Liscannow itself sit up."

There was no lack of work to make a man happy, Maurice thought, as he listened. All that had been done up to this was nothing to what was still to do. Work was the great thing. Seated on the warm coping, he dangled his legs over the side of the slip, the cool, green water lapping the soles of his shoes. The gold of the tarred jumper of one of the fishermen seemed to colour his thick, yellow beard and the bronze of his cheek.

"Next winter ye might be making a bid for the slip," another man said, in a detached voice as if addressing the sea.

"We might," Maurice said.

That would be more work, he thought, and he watched the sun dance on the bottom of an old up-turned boat. The tar glistened in the light, and shone like beautiful, old watered silk with depths and depths of colour. He said aloud—

"This will never do, idling here," and he jumped up.

"It's not often you have an idle minute. You're near as busy as ourselves," an old man said, pausing in his labour of throwing pebbles into the smooth water, but without lifting his eyes from the circles they made.

"If it's only as much as you he and his like did, *you* wouldn't have a roof over your head, Shaun Mick," another said.

"Amn't I working hard?"

"The master does more than throw pebbles."

"God be with you then, master," the old man said. "'Tis you have your work cut out for you. Though it's all only pebble-flinging in the end."

Work, work, work, sounded in Maurice's ears as he walked. Work—even on the surface of things—was the secret of life. He took the long way home, round by the Strand chapel.

"You wouldn't recognize a person, I suppose?" Miss Devoy said, running out of the chapel gateway. "I saw you at the Feis yesterday, but you hadn't an eye for me."

"I was busy," he said awkwardly.

"A blind man'd see what you were most busy about."

He looked at her nervously, and she winked elaborately.

"Come up to the house, and I'll give you a cup of tea. Feis, indeed! This two months and more I saw what was wrong with you. It was a relief to me, too, though I didn't let on. You see, I was told different."

He stammered something about having to get home, afraid of what she might say next.

"I'll walk up a bit of the road with you, then. There's something I want a word with you about."

She was very hot but self-possessed, and mopped her streaming forehead with a large handkerchief.

"Your own mother as much as said one thing or another to me, and Father James gave me a plain hint of it. I didn't say anything agin it, and maybe gave it a helping hand, so to speak. You were always nice and friendly, but I saw no signs. What's more, I might tell you, if you'll believe me, I always kept on with Patsey Brophy of Liscannow, and glad I am now that I did."

"Brophy, the builder," he said, seeing light. "I'm very glad."

She hung her head coquettishly. "There's some that call him a stone-mason," she said gratefully, "but you have better manners. And he having three men of his own under him now! A builder, even in a small way—but he's blossoming out and expecting the contract of the new labourers' cottages—is near as good as a schoolmaster?" She spoke almost shyly, with an eager questioning intonation in her voice.

"As good? Ten times better."

"I'm glad to hear you say it," she said with relief. "Father James has put the fear of God into me, and I was afraid he might think I'd be demeaning him. He has grand notions," she added reflectively.

"You'll be well out of the teaching anyway. One's soul isn't one's own at it."

"Thinking of the bark of Father James's tongue you are, I suppose," she said doubtfully. "Sure it always seemed to hop off you like water off a duck's back. It's different with a relation. If I go agin him, he might put bad luck on my marriage—you know the kind of cross a priest can put on a woman. Jessy Burke, that married against his will, hasn't a child to her bosom to this day. Besides, I don't want him to drive me out of the school. I want to hang on to it for a start, at any rate. It'd be a good luck penny in the house and Patsey not firm on his feet yet."

The skin under her eyelids went pale, and her eyes had a strained look. Maurice did his best to cheer her. She began to sob.

"It isn't as if I had the whole world running after me. If I miss the chance of Patsey, I might

be stranded on the Skellig rocks for life and go single to my grave," she said with a pitiful attempt at a smile.

"I don't think Father Mahon will interfere," Maurice said, trying to put some conviction into his voice.

"He's always boasting of the good he's doing for his relations. But sure, I'd rather have another man doing me an injury than him doing me good," she said ruefully. "Patsey is going to hang out a new sign with 'Builder and Contractor' on it, and maybe that might work miracles," she added hopefully after a few seconds' thought. "Anyway it's been a great comfort to me to talk to you. If you won't come into the house I must be going. My mother'll be crying out for her tea, and no one about to get it for her, and she tied to her chair with the rheumatics." She shook his hand warmly.

When they had both gone a few paces she turned back, ran after him and thrust a small gilt medal into his hand.

"No matter what people might say, you've always been the best of friends to me. There—take that. It's a blessed medal of St. Benedict. You'll see if it don't give you a helping hand. It was given to me by my cousin that's a nun inside in Liscannow convent. Blessed by the hands of the Pope himself! And she swore 'twas infallible in matters of the kind. And didn't I prove the truth of her words by sewing it out of sight in a tie I once gave Patsey for a Christmas box? Give her a little present that she'll be always wearing and sew the medal up in it—before many days she'll be running to be baptized and coming to mass, and the way'll be paved straight for the both of ye."

Her words tumbled out in a rush and she had gone before he realized what she meant. He gazed foolishly at the medal in his palm. He went hot and cold. For a moment Miss Devoy's evident faith influenced him. What if there was something in it? He walked on fingering the medal curiously. Then he laughed bitterly. He lifted his arm to throw the medal away, but all the instinct of his faith made him stay his hand. He dropped it carefully into his waistcoat pocket. He felt angry, and sought round in his mind for a cause. Not with the superstition. That was even interesting. There might be a good deal of folk-lore behind it—he must ask Driscoll. He knocked the head off a dandelion with his stick. Was he angry with Miss Devoy for guessing his secret? But he was to blame, not she. He was going round like a fool wearing his heart on his sleeve. . . .

By the time he arrived at home he had made several resolutions—to avoid meeting Alice Barton, not to speak of her, not to think of her. “If I can at all,” he added doubtfully after the last.

CHAPTER XV

IN the weeks that followed Maurice struggled to keep his resolutions. He could not help thinking of Alice. He put the thought of her away, but it came back again. She smiled at him from his proofs, in his dreams, and in those first waking moments when he seemed to have no will. The more he avoided her, the more he seemed to think of her. For whole weeks he did not see her at all. When they met, of necessity, at some committee meeting, or accidentally, on the road, he felt on fire, but congratulated himself on his coolness and the level tone of his voice. He feared that she would see that he avoided her. But she seemed not to notice it. Once or twice he thought he saw a questioning look in her eyes, but it had gone when he looked again.

Father Malone spoke of her once, and Maurice said it was "all off." The priest said "thank God," and gazed wonderingly at Maurice, who walked away abruptly with an angry frown.

"Never mention her name to me again," he said, when Driscoll spoke of her.

"If you'd only talk of her you wouldn't be wearing your heart out thinking of her," the old man said with a sigh; but Maurice sat doggedly silent.

He worked as he had never worked before.

The proofs were finished. Towards the end of the vacation he helped Tom, who was county secretary, to re-organize the Gaelic Athletic Association. There were meetings in the Mechanics' Hall at Liscannow, and he made his first public speech.

"It's case equal to you with the tongue or the pen," Tom said, meaning high praise. There was another extension of the parish work. Now it was winter-dairying. Father Malone got hold of the idea, but as he was busy with his clerical work owing to Father Mahon's frequent absences, Maurice and Driscoll had to interview the farmers and set the scheme going. One morning six copies of a little paper-covered book came by post. He was interested in a head-piece of Celtic design on the first page, but he could not read a word. He hid away all the copies except the one Driscoll always carried about in his coat pocket. The publisher, to whom he had sold the book outright for ten pounds, hinted at a second series. He tried to work at it, but his thoughts wandered, and he stuck fast in the first tale. Work of his own he found he couldn't do, though his capacity for other work seemed to have no end.

School opened again, and he added two extra subjects to the programme. He audited the accounts of the Agricultural Society. As he and Driscoll sat working of nights at the table in the kitchen, the desultory talk in between was of "movements," the school, and folk-lore. Alice gradually faded into the impersonal lady of his dreams. He was restless and fitful, but he did not connect this particularly with her. At a committee meeting he heard almost with indifference that she was leaving in a month. Her work, all agreed, was

done—and done well, and that seemed to be all that mattered. He was able to answer Miss Devoy's covert allusions to her with a smile.

Early in September he got a letter from the editor of a Dublin newspaper with an offer for a column article every week—a short folk story with a translation and a glossary, for which he was to get a pound a week. He laughed heartily when he read the letter—Driscoll said it was the first real laugh he gave out of him for a couple of months. Any tales that might hurt the susceptibility of the dominant political party, or of the Church, were to be rigidly excluded : he should be particularly careful to omit all medieval freedom of expression in regard to religion : his book, on the whole, was excellent, and had led to this offer, but some of the tales erred in these respects.

“It's a funny country,” Maurice said.

“It is,” Driscoll said, “in some ways. I'd take the job though, if I were you. With your ideas it's as well for a schoolmaster to have a second string to his bow.”

“I've a lot to do. But I have enough stories by me to last a couple of years, so maybe I might as well. It passes the wit of man though to know how they can afford to pay such a lot of money for so little work.”

“It's wonderful, glory be to God,” Driscoll said. “That puts me in mind—I came out here last night at two o'clock for a drink of water, and the light was still shining under your sitting-room door, and you promising me to go to bed at twelve.”

“I was writing that memorial about the boat-slip.”

"Slip or no slip, you'll have to take care of your health. The day after to-morrow is the Liscannow races, and you must go there with me. It's a holiday in the school, so you've no excuse. It'll get your mind off things even if you don't care for horses itself—and that's a great lack in you."

Maurice grumbled that there were a hundred things to be done, but ten o'clock on the morning of the races found him and Driscoll on foot for Liscannow. Carts and side-cars, laden with people, passed from Lissoff and beyond.

"There's a car from Drimna—I know the driver of it—thirty miles if it's an inch. The Lord only knows when they must have started. At cock-crow belike," Driscoll said.

"The country'd be made if they took the same interest in better things."

"It would. Still it's no bad thing to care for horses—and it's that they come for, and not the betting. It's different in the towns, I'm told."

"Have you the right time on you, master?" Teigue Donlon shouted from the top of a straw rick in his haggard, a short distance from the road.

"A quarter-past ten."

"I told you the old clock was fast if any. Stick to it, boys and girls. Sorra one need leave this until ye hear the stroke of eleven, and be in plenty of time after," he shouted to a score of workers, above the din of the threshing machine. "'Twas a great harvest, thanks be to God," he continued, addressing Driscoll and Maurice. "We kept at the threshing till dark last night, but we couldn't come within stacks of finishing." He caught an armful of straw from off a pike as he spoke, fixed it deftly on the rick and trod it down.

"It was very kindly of the neighbours to come at all to-day, and the day that's in it. But here they were at the dawn; though they're on tenterhooks now for fear they'd miss the first race. Down with the sheaves, Larry," to the man on a disappearing stack of oats. "Feed her as fast as she'll swallow, Thade," to the man at the thresher; "cram them down her throat, and there won't be an ear left, please God, at the first stroke of the clock."

Tom Blake wiped the sweat off his face with the sleeve of his flannel bawneen as he stuck his pike into a bundle of straw, high as himself. The driver of the two pairs of horses, turning the machine, cracked his whip and the horses put on pace. Sheaves flew. There was a procession of straw, held aloft on pikes and concealing the bearers, from the machine to the rick. Men ran with heavy sacks of threshed oats to the sheeogues. Hanny Blake handed cups of buttermilk to the thirsty, who drank as they worked.

"God bless the work," Driscoll shouted in Irish. "Ye'll do it and to spare, if you keep up that spurt."

As they drew nearer to Liscannow, farmyards and fields were deserted. Oats called loudly for reaping, but the reapers, in their Sunday best, wended their way to the town. Young and old had an air of being out to enjoy themselves. There was no sign of the business preoccupation of a market-day or fair. In the carts to-day were no pigs or calves or poultry, the selling price of which was a matter of anxious calculation; only a human freight of men who had left black care behind on their farms, gaily be-ribboned women, with chubby-faced children hanging over the tail-boards. A

brilliant September sun gave a warm colour to the fields of stubble and ripe corn, shone crimson and gold on the turning leaves in the hedgerows, and seemed even to gild the thin jests of the holiday makers.

"Make way there for Paudeen Flaherty's racer," greeted an old man, in a tall felt hat and cutaway coat, astride a spavined mule. He bowed left and right, his long legs flapping against the sack that served as a saddle.

"Is it the Farmers' Plate or the Hunt Cup you're aiming at, Paudeen?"

"It might be both," Paudeen said with a broad grin.

The streets of Liscannow were thronged. There was a din of "Correct card," "Correct card and bill of the races." The shops were still open, and did a thriving trade. Shopkeepers and their assistants were in holiday humour and attire. Not even in the butchers' stalls was an apron worn. The utmost concession to business on this day of days was a discarded coat, hung up, however, within easy reach, inside the counter. As midday passed, anxious eyes were cast at clocks. When the half after twelve boomed from the cathedral tower, customers were unceremoniously bundled out of the shops, shutters were hastily put up and doors were locked. At a quarter to one Liscannow was like a town of the dead. A long mile separated the town from the race-course. The first race was timed for one o'clock, so there was need to hurry. A thick crowd jostled and pressed up the hill, past the asylum and the jail. Half a dozen feeble old men, in corduroy trousers and the peculiar coat, grey frieze and collarless, that marked

the pauper, hung about the workhouse gate, with anxious eyes on the race-course in the hollow. One tried to straighten his bent back, clutched his stick firmly, and stepped forward. Another pulled him back.

"Don't venture it, Dan. We'd be crushed to death in that crowd. Wait till the stream slackens."

"Man and boy, I never missed the first race for seventy years, and I ten years in the workhouse itself," Dan muttered, his palsied head shaking.

"Sure they won't drop the flag till they see you on the course."

"There's something in that, and I a well-known ancient monument in it," Dan said, with a note of pride in his voice.

There was, however, little fear that he should be late. Long after one o'clock no attempt had been made at a start. Driscoll was making a leisurely inspection of the jumps.

"That's where every man came down in '79," he said at the sunk fence. "But the ground is in fine fettle to-day. Neither too hard nor too soft."

"It's half-past one," Maurice said; "we ought to hurry to our place."

"It's one of the queer things about human nature and the Liscannow races," Driscoll said, "that the people near break their necks to be on the course at one o'clock, and still every one knows that sorra race'll be run till two o'clock, or maybe after. A finer race-course there isn't in the whole world," he added, looking round admiringly. "It was cut out by the hand of God Himself for it."

They wandered about among the crowd, greeting an acquaintance here and there. At two Driscoll led Maurice to a knoll at the foot of Slieve Mor, from

which, he held, the best view was to be had. The narrow valley, with every jump in sight, stretched at their feet. Over against them, on the side of the short hill that hid Liscannow, was the unsightly structure of rough planks known as the grand stand. Long, low tents, mounted on semicircular willow wattles, studded the base of the hills and the centre of the oval track. Tawdry flags fluttered in a slight breeze. The raucous voices of the few bookmakers in the enclosure, echoed from the mountain opposite. Pewter pots clinked on the tables in front of the tents. A roaring trade was done in porter, pig's crubeens, ginger-bread, and apples. Cheap-jacks cried their wares. A forlorn nigger minstrel on an empty brandy case strummed a banjo. The crowd was everywhere. People ate and drank and were merry, or made a luckless venture on the three-card trick or the thimble. A bell sounded, and loud voices cried, "Clear the course." The grand stand grew into a patch of gay colour. The crowd hastened to any, and every, eminence that promised a view. Excitement grew as the horses were led to the post.

"Fourteen starters," Father Delahunty said in a loud voice from the priests' hill, a small mound, east of the rock on which Maurice and Driscoll sat; "it's a great field entirely. Don't be pressing up here," he added good-humouredly, as a few boys climbed within ten or twelve paces of where a score of priests lounged, "or we'll be lost entirely."

Maurice looked at Driscoll inquiringly. "They've some law of their own," the old man whispered with a smile, "against attending races. But some clever theologian made out that as long as they weren't joined to the throng they were out of the course."

"They're off, they're off," rose in a frenzied shout.

"Well done, yellow cappeen."

"He's down, I tell you."

"If he was he's on his legs again. There he is before your eyes."

When the yellow cap won in a close finish, Driscoll, as excited as the crowd, ran towards the grand stand, shouting to Maurice to follow. He lost sight of Driscoll in crossing the course, and was hastening his steps in pursuit, when a voice called out beside him—

"Don't be running away. You're the very man I wanted."

He turned and saw Tom and Minnie and Alice.

"The wife there isn't feeling very well, and I must be taking her home," Tom said in a stage whisper. "Not herself by any manner of means these times, though it's natural enough, and the state she's in. But she'll be fretting if we spoil the day for Miss Barton. She came along with us, John Crawford, poor man, not holding with races, though willing to give freedom to her if she had a mind. Let you keep an eye on her, Maurice, like a good man, and see her safe home."

Maurice mumbled a confused acceptance of the charge. Alice laughed, offered to go home with Minnie, who would not hear of it. They disputed a little. A strange fear that Alice would prevail came over Maurice. He breathed with relief when she said—

"All right then—if Mr. Blake won't think me a nuisance."

This seemed so absurd that he laughed. They

saw Tom and Minnie to the outskirts of the crowd, and then wandered back over the course. The sun shone brighter and the people looked happier since he met her. They ate apples and gingerbread, and drank lemonade, standing by a table at a tent door. She enjoyed everything—a chalked-face acrobat who twirled a barrel on his toes, a ballad singer who sang cheerfully of an execution. He forgot Driscoll till the course was being cleared for the second race, too late to seek him at his usual stand. A short way up a track that led to the pass over the mountain they stood to watch the race.

The crowd again converged on the grand stand as the horses passed the winning-post.

"There must be a fine view higher up," she said, her eyes on the winding path. "I never saw it."

"There is."

She looked at him. He nodded. She led the way up the narrow path. They climbed for nearly half an hour, easily, and in silence. Only once she spoke. She picked a gentian. "That's new to me," she said, pinning it on her coat. A bell clanged faintly as they reached the stile giving on the mountain road.

"That's another race," he said doubtfully.

She turned round for the first time and looked back.

"This is better," she said, drawing a deep breath.

He followed her eyes, past the curiously small crowd of midgets that moved hither and thither in the valley, over the low hill to Liscannow, to the boats lying idly in the harbour. In the offing a four-masted schooner hung motionless

on the glassy sea. A ripple that seemed but a shadow swept over the water in her wake. Her sails filled out, and, in a few seconds, she had passed the line of the cathedral spire. A hoarse murmur arose from the valley.

"They are off," he said.

"There is Durrisk—and the trees in Uncle John's bawn. Oh, the race! What matter?"

"The view is better higher up," he said.

They followed the road for a mile, branched off by a pathway, and soon stood on the summit of a spur, some yards higher than the road.

"The gap," he said.

On the right a flat-topped hill was carpeted thick with heather—a purple sea with oases of vivid green fern. Slieve Mor seemed to have receded across another valley, brown with peat bogs, through which a thin white road wound sinuously till it was lost in the side of the mountain. Funny little fields of green and gold, like the squares on a chess-board, only more irregular in shape, surrounded the scattered cottages that gleamed white in the sun. Away on the left was the sea again, bordered with yellow sands, and beyond, a long mountain range with a ridge like a toothed saw. She turned round and looked down on Liscannow. The race-course was hidden. Only faint sounds, like the rustling of leaves in a light wind, ascended from the valley. The ship seemed closer to land, and, far away, the horizon was lost in a silver haze. The windows of Bourneen chapel reflected the sun like mirrors. A rich plain rolled between the mountains and the sea, to Liscoff and beyond. A warm crimson tinged everything.

"I've felt it for some time—even with this sun

one notices it—with a grey sky there is no doubting it—the colour of Ireland is brown not green.”

She spoke in a detached voice, hesitatingly, as if she was disentangling one thought from another.

“You are tired,” he said: “won’t you sit down?”

They sat on the parched grass. She plucked a spray of heather from a clump beside her and fingered the purple bells tenderly.

Maurice stared at the shimmering sea. “There is so much to say,” he said.

“Yes?”

“I avoided you because I love you.”

Since he left the race-course his mind had been calm. He took it for granted that there was something he had to say to her, but he thought of it hardly at all. He spoke now without feeling, as if reading on the sea, something that had been written there ages ago.

“That was it then,” she nipped off one of the bells and watched it drop slowly to the ground.

“They said—friends like Driscoll and Father Malone—that I should lose my job here, that it would be an end to my work.”

Her fingers closed tightly on another bell, but she didn’t pull it off. She listened intently.

“I was tempted to be a coward. Things one is doing have a way of winding themselves round one. They become part of one. One feels there is no living without them. But I didn’t give in to that. I felt, and I’m certain of it sitting here, that there was something that mattered more, a man’s freedom, and—love.”

She exhaled the breath, which she had been holding, in a short sigh of relief. Her bosom rose

and fell gently. She seemed absorbed in the colour of the spray, holding it out to catch the light at different angles.

"Tell me everything from the beginning," she said evenly, without looking at him.

She did not take her eyes off the spray while he spoke. She held it motionless.

"That's how it stands," he wound up. "It's no disgrace to you to hear that a man loves you and wants more than anything in the world to marry you——"

"No," she said, through half-opened lips.

"But," he said, looking at her for the first time—she seemed to feel his eyes, lifted hers, and met his squarely,—“before I ask you whether you love me or'll marry me, there's one condition if you say Yes. Father James may give in—then 'twill be all right. If he doesn't, and I have to make a living elsewhere, you'll be free of any promise till I earn enough to support you in comfort.”

"Comfort! They say men in love are very dull-witted. I don't love conditionally," she said, with a pathetic little smile.

He looked at her, and what he read in the depths of her eyes made him kiss her full on the mouth. For a moment her head slid weakly on to his shoulder. He felt her heart beat as loudly as his own. Her hat had fallen back. The westering sun crowned her head with gold. A loose strand of hair brushed against his lips. She pushed him away gently, and a shy smile lit her crimsoned face as she fixed her hat.

"Difference of religion is a small thing to us," he said.

"God has a way of ignoring these differences," she said, looking full in the level rays of the sun. She chanted half to herself—

"Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

"That sounds like the Bible—I don't know it much. Catholics don't read it," he said simply.

"We have the one country and the one God—they must let us serve Him as our hearts bid us," she said rising. She laughed happily, a ringing laugh that sounded in Maurice's ears like music against the silence. "You are a nice lover—you've put me to the shame of accepting you without being asked."

"I believe you led me up here to propose to me?" he said with a gleam in his eyes.

She looked at him serenely. "Aunt Ruth says men are only poor whist bodies," she said lightly, leading the way down the path. "If we dawdle here any longer we'll miss all the races."

She still had the spray of heather in her hand. She gazed at it curiously, buried her face in it, hummed a tune, fixed the heather in her blouse and buttoned her coat over it. They walked down the road abreast. Alice was grave and silent. At the stile leading to the race-course she began to sob quietly.

"Why? What in the world?" he said in surprise.

"Nothing," she said.

He kissed her. She clung to him and sobbed aloud—

"You'll miss your work here. It's all my fault, and so much depending on you. You'll make a

fight to keep it, Maurice? No priest could be so cruel——”

“Never mind, little girl. If my work here goes, I must find or make other work. Besides, one day I’ll be making you give up yours, and you’re fond enough of it.”

“Oh, mine! mine is different,” she said thoughtfully.

“I’ll fight of course,” he said firmly. “There are bigger interests than ours involved in this.”

“Some day I may see that,” she said, mounting the stile, “but to-day ours is big enough for me. It fills the whole world.”

They walked in single file down the steep path, speaking little. Once she said, “We’ll slip away home quietly. I feel shy of meeting any one.” And again, with a puckered brow, “Without trouble of one kind or another maybe we’d pass real happiness by, without knowing it.” When they were half-way down a race started. They stood for a few minutes to watch it. The crowd cheered the winner lustily.

“I wonder if the beaten have any pleasure in the race?” she asked.

He was thinking of her, and of his coming interview with Father Mahon.

“We can’t be beaten. I can’t anyway—I have you now.”

She laughed softly.

At the end of the path Driscoll met them. He looked tired and worried.

“You, here?” Maurice said with surprise. “We were up at the gap.”

“The whole race-course knows it from Matsey Boylan,” Driscoll said dryly. “I thought you’d

have sense, Miss Barton, if Maurice had none itself."

"I have less than none," she said, with her old air of assurance. Then seeing the pained look on the old man's face, she caught his hand in both of hers and said eagerly, "You must be glad—you've been so good to him—and to me."

He looked from Alice to Maurice, smiled feebly and said—

"May God help you both."

CHAPTER XVI

MATSEY BOYLAN'S story had fleeter legs than the horses in the hunt race. By nightfall variants of it had reached many houses in Bourneen. All Matsey had seen was Maurice and Alice, several yards apart, walking up the path to the gap. He had followed them for a couple of hundred yards, till his weak feet gave out. He lost sight of them, sat on a boulder, nursing a feeble, jealous wrath in his half-witted mind. After waiting for an hour he returned to the race-course and told his tale, with some added embroidery, suggested by his imagination, on each repetition. He told Driscoll that he had seen Maurice Blake and the girl at the Crawfords' walking alone up the mountain. Jim Reardon said "Be off to hell out of this," when Matsey whispered with nods and winks that Maurice and Alice had been hugging and kissing. Instead, he sidled up to Dempsey, Crawford's workman, and announced mysteriously "queer carryings on entirely up there on the mountain out of sight of everybody."

So the story spread.

It was at home before Alice. John Crawford sat silent; Mrs. Crawford was excited and fussy. She made much noise in preparing tea on the kitchen table, but she said nothing.

"Don't you want to hear about the races?" Alice said, taking a chair in front of the fire.

"They're misfortunate things," Crawford said dourly.

"By all accounts, you didn't see much of them," Mrs. Crawford said, busily polishing a cup, her face to the dresser.

"Oh!" Alice said, looking from one to the other. Crawford was staring at the fire, and her aunt did not turn round.

"Maurice Blake asked me to marry him, and I said I would—I'm very fond of him," she added shyly, after a pause.

"Didn't I tell you?" Mrs. Crawford said triumphantly to her husband.

"There was never any lack of trust in her with me," Crawford said. "It's the idea of a mixed marriage that I don't like."

His eyes grew more gentle. Suddenly he stared as if he saw some horrible vision. He stood up, his hands clenched.

"It's not thinking of being a turn-coat you are?" he said harshly.

"No. Maurice is above that sort of meanness—and I hope I am," Alice said proudly.

"That's something at least," Crawford said with a sigh of relief.

"I wish I was at home," Alice said forlornly. Her lip trembled. She gulped in the effort to keep back tears.

Mrs. Crawford enfolded her in an ample bosom, patted her on the shoulder, and said angrily—

"There now, John Crawford, see what you've done with all your stiff-necked religious talk—she as much as saying that this house is no home to her. Don't cry, alanna. You that ought to be a father

and a mother to her," with a threatening look at her husband.

"It's because I'm fond of her," he said in a voice that betrayed little tenderness, though his eyes had softened.

Alice put her hand on his, and he pressed it.

"The Scarlet Woman has all the wiles of Satan," he said after a short silence.

"She won't beguile me," Alice said laughing.

"Troth, Alice'll be able for her," Mrs. Crawford said pleasantly. "It might easily be worse. He's a fine, up-standing boy with good pay though he's a Roman itself. Alice can bring up the girls her way of thinking, and Maurice'll likely want to carry the boys with him—still, a mother can do a great deal."

"You're only talking nonsense, woman," Crawford said, waving her opinions aside with an emphatic sweep of his hand. "That used to be the old way, but the Pope of Rome long ago changed it. I had a cousin of my own that once married a Papist, and I know the law of it." The unusual length of his speech seemed to worry him. He stood up, clutched the back of a chair and continued: "I read the paper that my cousin Richard was made to sign by the parish priest, and sorra word of it I liked—that he'd be married in a Catholic chapel, and that every one of the children, be they boys or girls, 'd be brought up Papists. And as if that wasn't enough, the woman he wanted to marry had to take her book oath, besides, that she'd make every endeavour to turn Richard into a Catholic."

"That's a fairly finished halter," Mrs. Crawford said, with a doubtful look at her husband.

"It is—and a promise is a promise whether it's

made to a priest or a minister," Crawford said, dropping wearily on his chair.

"I don't know that any woman'd think she'd be bound by a promise, wrung out of her in a minute of weakness. Come on now and let us have our supper. We're all starved—and that boy not in yet," Mrs. Crawford said, pouring water into the tea-pot.

"This is all new to me, Uncle John," Alice said, when her aunt moved to the table; "I don't believe Maurice knows. I'll speak to him. I was only thinking of him and his troubles—I'll tell you about them again. Only, Uncle John, I love him, you know."

He looked at her for a moment, kissed her forehead lightly and said—

"The blessing of God on you both."

An earlier version of Matsey's tale reached the Blakes. Jim Reardon called late to inquire about Minnie. He found her seated in a low chair by the fire, sewing some garment which she hid in her apron as he approached.

"Hanny is in the dairy," she said, "and the rest are seeing after one thing or another for the night."

"How is yourself?"

"What'd be wrong with me? 'Twas a great day, I'm told."

Jim laughed and looked round cautiously. "Maurice is the sly lad. If he wasn't seen kissing a girl to-day."

"Well I never—who was she?—who told you?" Mrs. Tom said excitedly.

"Matsey Boylan told me."

Minnie's face fell. "Oh, him!" she said

in a disappointed tone. "He sees kissing in his dreams. Didn't he say once that I kissed him—the hoary old ruffian that ought to be saying his prayers. But who was she anyway?"

"I oughtn't to mention it," Jim said doubtfully.

"What's the harm and there nothing in it—to your own sister too, and 'twon't pass my lips."

"Well, if you promise—'twas Miss Barton."

"Her—that bangs Banagher. You'd think butter wouldn't melt in either of their mouths. I wonder? I left them together, anyway."

Tom lifted the latch and came in.

"Tom, Tom," she shrieked, "if Maurice wasn't seen kissing Alice Barton to-day after we left."

"And why wouldn't he, if he wanted to," Tom said lightly.

"I never kissed a man but the one I married," Minnie said primly.

"You're a wonder, you are," Tom said, stroking her hair and winking at Jim. "And maybe Maurice is going to marry her."

"And she a Protestant—a likely job. Them quiet fellows are the worst when they go galivanting," she said, screwing her lips and eyes to a look of wisdom.

"I'm blest, but so she is—but why not if it goes to that?" Tom said, scratching his head. "She's a very complete girl no matter what her religion is."

Tom passed on the joke about "Maurice the rogue of the world" to Hanny when she came in; but she only looked at Jim Reardon and laughed.

"And who gave out that tale about my son?" Mrs. Blake said when she heard it.

"I never believed it, ma'am," Jim said eagerly.

"You, Jim Reardon—I'm ashamed of you.

I've a good mind to send you straight to bed, Hanny, sniggering there. It's them that are always hiding in dark corners themselves that'd spread a report about a boy that never looked the other side of the road a woman was at in his whole life. Kneel down every one of ye and say the rosary and ask God to forgive ye."

Later, when the others had gone, she and Mike sat before the fire.

"Do you think there's anything in it, Mike?" she asked anxiously.

"There might, and then there mightn't," Mike said, weighing his pipe on his forefinger judicially. "If one could see light over her being a Protestant, she wouldn't make a bad match at all. She could hold on to her job—it's great money they'd be drawing entirely."

"That's a fence that's not easy jumped—and God forbid that it should. I know the like is done, but none of my blood ever had a Protestant drop in their veins. 'Twas an unlucky day she came into the parish. May God and His Blessed Mother be about my boy's bed to-night."

"It's a dark problem surely," Mike said.

"You and your problems!" she said angrily, "and maybe the boy suffering from a heart scald."

"The like of that is easy got over."

"Your pipe is out. Be off to bed with you."

She sat long over the fire telling her beads. As she raked the ashes over the smouldering sods she ejaculated—

"God send he may not sup sorrow if his heart is set on her."

Father Mahon had been nursing disappointment

and a sharp attack of indigestion for two days. He had had authoritative information, from a friend in Rome, that Dr. Hannigan was not to be sent to Droomeen, but was to be held in reserve for a higher appointment, expected soon to fall vacant. He took a gloomy view of the world. He was vexed with Dr. Hannigan who must have known the intentions of the Roman authorities, and yet had allowed him, a friend, to go on lavishing expense and trouble on a fruitless quest. He was angry with himself for having neglected his parish for so long. He had some sort of dull grievance against the priests who had promised to support him, and against Father Malone who had done his work. His dignity and inclination had always fought over the Liscannow races. But now his dignity was momentarily in eclipse. He would have gone to the priests' hill, but at the last moment he quailed before inevitable references to the bishopric. It would have hurt him to admit that the chance was off: it would have hurt him, knowing what he knew, to discuss the bishopric as if it were still open. So he brooded in misery at home. There was also a minor annoyance that, at intervals, irritated him exceedingly. A colt which he had sold for a trifling price, was expected to win the Farmers' Plate. He felt that his judgment was at stake, and had no little anxiety to hear that Clinker had lost. He stayed up late in the hope that Father Delahunty or some friend would call on the way home from the races. Unhappily no one called.

Next morning, in the sacristy, he said gruffly to Matsey Boylan—

"My man is away. Run up to the house and wash my trap."

After breakfast he went out to the yard and looked on at the operation.

"You were at the races, yesterday?"

"I was then."

"What won the Farmers' Plate?"

Matsey scratched his head. "Sorra one of me passed any notice on it."

"I might have known your blind eyes could see nothing."

"Troth, they seen more than you think, your reverence. Queer things, I tell you," Matsey said, blinking foolishly, the mop, held head upwards, dripping on his shoes.

"What things?"

"The schoolmaster below," indicating the direction of the school with the mop, "and the girl that teaches the poultry."

"Hum?" Father James said, with an interrogative lifting of his eyebrows.

"Stole away alone up the mountain glen they did, and spent the whole day there out of sight of everybody—and the whole race-course remarking on it. The things that were said'd make a man's hair stiffen."

He shrank back from the priest's thunderous look, and began to mop the wheel of the trap nervously.

"I wasn't meaning any harm," he mumbled, looking up.

But Father James was stalking back to the house in all the just anger of righteousness. That a schoolmaster of his should be the cause of scandal to a whole countryside! It was an injury to himself that cut him to the quick. What would the world think of him to tolerate such conduct? He

stamped through the hall and walked rapidly up and down the path in front of the house with bent brows. Ordinarily he discounted most of what Matsey said, but he never questioned reflections on any one's morality. He knew how hard it was to keep strong passions in control. And as others had not his strength, given the occasion, he suspected them of the worst. And had he not ample evidence against this Blake? He had stood up against his priest, was disobedient and rebellious. Goodness only knew how long this unholy passion existed. There was that Protestant girl—and every one knew Protestant girls had no morals, for there was no one to keep a heavy hand over them—loose on the parish for nearly six months. She must have been at the bottom of Blake's refusal of the decent marriage which he, in the goodness of his heart, had offered him. All the circumstances aggravated Blake's offence. As a teacher he insulted his manager, as a parishioner his parish priest. His anger grew. His official position was dragged in the mire. He was flouted as the guardian of morals and religion. . . . His anger exhausted itself in the thought that he had the power to punish. His self-confidence, which had been dormant for a few days, revived. He drew himself up in the middle of the path, stretched out his arms, bent them as if expanding the muscles. He felt physically better already. The languor and unrest of dyspepsia had passed away. He set his jaws and sniffed the air, scenting battle joyfully. He went into his study, wrote a short note, rang the bell, sent for Matsey Boylan, and, handing him the note, said—

“Here, take that down to the schoolmaster

at the village, and don't let the grass grow under your feet."

Ever since he parted from Alice, Maurice Blake felt himself another man. He seemed to have grown past his own recognition. His limbs swung freely with a new strength. Mind and body and will were in harmony. The gorgeous colours in the evening sky were only a faint reflex of something mysterious and satisfying within himself. The road had a resilience it lacked before. There was music in the loud rattle of harness as jolting, springless carts went by rapidly from the races, and in the cracking of whips and in the peals of harsh laughter. Driscoll alone seemed outside a universal joy. He was morose and silent. Once he stumbled over a loose stone. His feet dragged and his face had a drawn look. Maurice offered him an arm. He leant heavily on it, but did not speak. He stopped opposite the parochial house. Nodding towards the light in Father Mahon's study window he said—

"He'll break you if you go on with this madness."

"He can't touch me."

"He can drive you out of the parish."

"That's nothing."

"Have you no fear at all in you?"

"I have not—only sorrow that you're taking things so much to heart."

"And no sorrow for putting yourself in danger of leaving your work that I thought your heart was in?"

"And you thought rightly. But a man's work is only a part of him, and something bigger than myself has hold of me to-night. It——"

His voice trailed off as if no further words were necessary. His eyes sought the sky in the west. What he felt was all there in that luminous arc of indescribable colour, the afterglow of the departed sun, a blend of the brilliant hues of a moment back—the love that shut out fear, that gave his soul the freedom of the illimitable spaces beyond the stars and filled it with trust and hope and faith. . . .

Yet it saddened him a little in his great joy that Driscoll only gave a weary sigh.

In his dreams that night the lady of his childhood came again. She was seated on the spur above the gap road. The sun caught her hair. Her lonely, detached look had gone. Her eyes were the eyes of Alice Barton, and her hair, as he clasped her to his heart, had the same fragrance that still remained in his senses from the afternoon.

In the morning he was up with the dawn. He threw his window open wide to the growing light and the twittering of birds. A cool breeze fanned his face. His heart was full of sound and colour and a deep content. Red gold rays shot up in the east, paling the softer tints. Sitting by the open window he wrote his column for *The Star of Liberty*. At breakfast he read it to Driscoll, who seemed brighter, and walked with him to the school gate, discussing the tale. As usual on the day after a holiday the children were late. Stragglers were still coming in when Matsey Boylan appeared at the door and beckoned mysteriously. In the porch Maurice read the note, a curt command to come at once to the parochial house. He told Miss Devoy, who had just come in smiling, that he had to leave for a few minutes. He went back to the schoolroom

and arranged the classes. As he passed out, Matsey was lingering at the gate.

"Toko you'll be getting up above," he said, with a jerk of his head towards Father Mahon's house.

Maurice laughed. "Had you a good day yesterday, Matsey?" he said pleasantly.

"Only middling," Matsey said dismally. "But it might brighten up, it might brighten up—Matsey might have his day yet," he added with a leer.

The serjeant of police lounged at the barrack gate, capless, his tunic open, his hands thrust into the waist of his trousers.

"Easy known you hadn't the Liscannow pubs to mind on a race night. I'm that tired I haven't the heart to shave myself," he said with a yawn.

Maurice passed on with a wave of his hand. He was vaguely wondering what Father Mahon could want him for. Perhaps about the confirmation on Tuesday week—some fault-finding, of course. Anyway, the children were prepared. He might as well have it out with the priest now about Alice. Or should he wait till he had another talk with her? He hummed blithely.

"That's not the funeral march of them fool societies of yours by any chance?" Clancy, of the general shop, said with a grin.

"You'll be buying your own manure from us next," Maurice said cheerfully.

"I wouldn't mind taking your bankrupt stock—it'll likely be in the market soon—dirt cheap. But where are you off to? and it school time too."

"To see the manager."

"He's the sensible man, now! with none of ye'r new-fangled nonsense and amachoor shopkeeping.

Let me know when ye're in Stubbs's list. Clancy and long credit'll beat down ready-money—with the lads you've to deal with."

"They've more sense than that," Maurice said laughing and walking on.

"God help your head," Clancy shouted, good-humouredly.

Father Mahon was seated at his desk when Maurice entered the study.

"Sit down there," he said, turning round and pointing to a chair beside the desk.

Maurice sat with his face towards the priest, who glared at a paper on the desk.

"This is a copy of our agreement," he said, flattening out the paper with his open palm. "Terminable on three months' notice, or," he raised his voice, "without notice, for cause—for cause, do you hear?" he added in an emphatic shout.

"I hear."

"You hear, do you? Maybe, you'd soon have to heed it. You're a nice example to the innocent young children of the parish! I'll put the fear of God into you before I'm done—trapseing the mountains with Protestant sluts!"

It was some seconds before Maurice realized what the priest had said.

"That look of injured innocence is thrown away on me," Father Mahon continued angrily. "You and your Protestant——"

"Stop," Maurice interrupted quietly. His eyes blazed. "You may say something that'll make me forget you're a priest—if you're speaking of the girl who is to be my wife."

The priest, who was rising angrily from his

chair, dropped back into it again. His jaw fell. He stared at Maurice in astonishment.

"I don't remember her name—that niece of Crawford's?" he said limply.

"Yes," Maurice said coldly, "and I want a dispensation to marry her."

Father Mahon steadied himself with the arms of his chair. His face grew livid. He attempted to speak, but only muttered incoherently. His eyes fell on the agreement on the desk. He gazed at it for several minutes in silence. He seized a pen and wrote rapidly on a sheet of note-paper. He unlocked a drawer, took out a cheque-book and filled in a cheque. When he looked again at Maurice his face had changed to an expression of contempt.

"There, take that," he said.

Maurice took the sheet of paper and the cheque. When he had read the notice of summary dismissal, he held up the cheque and asked with a wry smile—

"What is this for?"

"Oh, that—I don't owe it to you of course—but to save trouble—three months' pay in lieu of notice."

"So you know you're doing wrong," Maurice said, placing the cheque on the desk.

"That's your game, is it? Wrong, am I? I don't give that," snapping his fingers, "for all you can do—or your Teachers' Union either—or the National Board. I'm manager and I'll do as I like. And if you go to law a jury can be trusted to deal with a dangerous character like you—without morality or religion. Not that you have a leg to stand on—I'm dismissing you for cause."

He stood up and waved his hand towards the door. "Don't darken the door of my school again."

Maurice made a successful effort to restrain his temper. It was all some ghastly mistake, he thought—some misapprehension on the priest's part. He himself had been too hasty.

"What is the cause?" he asked quietly.

"Grave public scandal."

"What scandal?"

"I'll give you no explanation—far be it from me. You have an appeal against me to the bishop—if you think it worth while."

"I suppose that's all that's left to me," Maurice said bitterly. "What about the dispensation?"

"You can ask the bishop for that too," Father Mahon said, again pointing to the door. "You'll never get it with my good will—you—— See if I don't put a spoke in your wheel."

CHAPTER XVII

A THIN drizzle of rain fell from early morning on the day of the Confirmation at Bourneen. A white mist hung over the village, light and silvery, with a promise of sunshine that did not come. The trees loomed ghost-like in the still air. Occasionally a sodden, faded leaf fell slowly to the ground. A grey rime frosted the heavy nap of freize coats and woollen shawls, evaporating in the warm air almost as quickly as it formed. Boys whistled cheerfully, regardless of the rain, and one said, "There isn't enough wet in a month of it to pierce my new coat." But the little girls suffered. Their long hair was lank and damp; their thin, white dresses, coloured sashes, and white stockings were limp and draggled. Anxious mothers hurried their children into the church porch and tried to make good the damage of the weather. Men lounged outside, smoked, chatted in low tones, or idly watched the intermittent stream of people, afoot, in carts, traps and side-cars, arriving at the gate. A dozen or more priests in heavy overcoats and silk hats passed by to the sacristy. Father Mahon, in soutane and surplice, an umbrella held high to protect his well-laundried surplice from the rain, walked several times to the gate and eagerly scanned the road in the direction of Liscannow.

"He's as nervous as a clucking hen," Hinnissey said.

"That's strange enough, and he next door to being a bishop himself, I'm told," Larry Reardon said.

"The Lord save us, he'll be a holy terror entirely then."

"How will Maurice Blake come out of it, do you think?" Teigue Donlon asked. "They say the bishop himself is going to have a hand in it."

"Sorra word Mike Blake'll say on it, but pull a long face, though I'm connected with him myself," Larry Reardon said. "Not a foot I'd come near this to-day, and I having a barn full of wheat to put into sacks, only I'm expecting the bishop to say a word about it from the altar."

"The same here," Teigue said. "The parish is full of it. There's as many tales going round as there's spikes on a hedgehog."

"There's great fairness in the bishop, they say," Larry said.

"He's a soft-spoken man," Hinnissey said, with a keen eye on a slight clearing in the mist.

In the sacristy a group of priests stood round the fire-place. Through the window Father Mahon's stalwart form could be seen swinging down the path to the gate.

"Sacking teachers without notice he is now," one said, with a nod at the window.

"What? Eh? That's a dangerous game in these times," another said eagerly, "with or without notice, begannies."

"He's a great man, James is."

"Some day he'll cut off more than he can chew. Drink?"

"No. Women. Wants to marry a Protestant, or some foolishness like that."

"Phew!" with a prolonged sibilant whistle. "What do you say, Delahunty? You're sure to know all about it."

"Tell them, Cassidy," Delahunty said to his curate.

Cassidy's prominent blue eyes flashed. "There's only one thing to be said about it," he said emphatically. "It's a damned shame."

"That's no way to speak in the sacristy," a severe-looking, elderly priest said, "and of your betters too."

"I'd say it before the altar, or to the bishop himself if I got the chance," Cassidy said warmly.

"He has great practice on me," Delahunty said whimsically, "and he's often right enough too."

"Wait till he's a manager himself, and he'll change his tune."

"When I am, I hope managers'll be docked of the cruel powers they have now—taking the bread out of the mouths of decent men," Cassidy said excitedly. "Here's Malone, he can tell you all about it." He walked frowning to the window, muttering in a loud voice, "The best teacher in the diocese too—written a book on the Irish—faked-up nonsense of Mahon's—all because he can't stand any one crowing near his own dung-hill—a nice man to give votes for a bishopric to."

The priests crowded round Malone as he came in from the church.

"Tell us the rights of this teacher business?"

"Is Mahon likely to get a fall over it?"

"It's all very sad—very sad," Father Malone said nervously. "I hope the bishop will set it right. He's seeing Maurice Blake this afternoon. I——"

"His lordship is at the gate," Matsey Boylan

said in a wheezing, panting voice, running in excitedly from the yard.

A brougham drove up to the sacristy door at half trot, Father Mahon alongside, the umbrella aloft in his left hand, holding a firm grip on the handle of the carriage door with his right. He held the umbrella over the bishop as he descended, and made as if to kneel on the wet ground on kissing the bishop's ring, but Dr. Hannigan, with a deprecating smile in his grey-brown eyes, said "Please not," and passed rapidly through the open sacristy door. The priests stood to attention as he entered, in attitudes of nervousness or conscious assurance. A faint smile played about the bishop's lips as he gave a quick, keen look round, taking in the whole room.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said coldly.

"It's a wet day for your lordship to be out in," one said.

"The poor children, the poor children," he said.

One took his hat, another his coat, a third opened the Gladstone bag, with which Matsey Boylan followed at his heels. Father Mahon pushed a priest aside brusquely, and himself unpacked the bishop's purple soutane and rochet, and helped him to vest.

After a silent prayer on the altar steps, Dr. Hannigan began the examination of the children, who filled the nave of the church. The aisles and galleries were packed with the older members of the congregation. Except the clergy and teachers, no grown people were in the nave. The Bourneen school children were in charge of Miss Devoy.

Maurice Blake looked on from a corner seat in one of the side galleries. All the morning he had intended to stay away, but, at the last moment, he

decided to come. "The bishop might say something at the visitation sermon," Driscoll said. As the appeal was not to be heard till later—the bishop, after some correspondence, had fixed three o'clock at the parochial house—Maurice did not believe that his case would be referred to. Still, the mere possibility drew him to the church.

The examination went through quickly. The bishop was decisive but gracious. He put three simple catechism questions to each child. If two were answered correctly he handed a confirmation card to the child, who went off immediately to confession to one of the priests, who were now, except a few who were in personal attendance on the bishop, in the confessionals, or seated, in stole and surplice, in secluded corners of the church. If two questions were missed a fourth was given, and on the result the child was either passed or put back for further instruction.

"Mahon'd never pick up that manner. He has the right touch to a die," Father Delahunty whispered to an old priest, with a nod towards the bishop.

"I don't know," the older man said, taking a pinch of snuff. "As he's going to pass them all, sooner or later, he might as well do it first as last."

"It's easy known, anyway, why *you* never wore a mitre," Delahunty said into the snuff-box which the old man held out.

As each school was finished the bishop said a few pleasant words of commendation to the teachers.

"This school?" he said to Miss Devoy.

"Bourneen, my lord," she said nervously.

Father Mahon frowned and shifted his feet uneasily, but the bishop was all smiles.

"An excellent school," he said, in a slightly raised voice, when the last boy was passed, "excellent indeed—most carefully prepared—reflects the utmost credit on the teachers."

Behind, Father Delahunty muttered "Oh?" in the tone of a question of some significance, and answered it himself with "Yes, yes, yes." In the gallery Hinnissey whispered to Donlon, "That tells well in Maurice Blake's favour."

The rejected children now came forward. After a few perfunctory questions all got cards. The bishop retired to the sacristy with Father Mahon and talked with him alone at some length.

The congregation broke up into groups. Some whispered in the seats. The majority, the weather having cleared, went out to the churchyard. A few children still clustered round a confession box. Others scampered to and fro, between the church and the yard, begged pennies from grown relatives, and bought cakes and sweets and apples at the standings in front of the yard gate. Maurice kept his seat. Several neighbours eyed him as if they wished to speak, hesitated and turned away. Under a gallery a group of priests chatted; half a dozen walked in a row up and down the path from the porch to the gate. Driscoll stood absorbed by the corner of the porch, as if watching intently the sunlight glistening on the wet, yellowing leaves.

"This is a bad business, Driscoll," Father Delahunty said, taking his arm.

Driscoll sighed. "I've talked and talked," he said, "but it's no good. And if Maurice Blake'd yield itself, which he won't, I doubt if Father James would."

"My best school'll be vacant at the end of the

quarter—Larkin is retiring. I put it to Cassidy, and he's strong for taking Maurice—Protestant wife and all. But that's all moonshine and Cassidy's enthusiasm. We'd be beaten dead on it. I'm too old to begin battering down windmills. Besides, there's no sense in putting every one's head in a halter—Blake's too. But short of the wife I'll stand to him, Mahon or no Mahon."

"Sure I know you'd do what you could, Father. But what you can do is no good, I'm afeared. Talking of going to Dublin, he is, if the bishop fails him, and giving up schoolmastering."

"I wish to God there were more Cassidys—we're only a cowardly crew—a decent greyhound'd be ashamed of us," the priest mumbled as he moved away, whilst Driscoll relapsed into contemplation of the leaves.

From a group of women came snatches of conversation.

"Run away now, children, and don't ye be listening. Yes, then, there's a penny between the three of ye. When ye've ate it, be off into the chapel with ye and be saying a prayer, and the bishop soon laying a holy hand on ye." In a lower voice. "If he was seen walking with her itself! a fine laughy girl, that took a cup of tea on my own floor, as civil as may be, when she was round about the hens. You'd think it was horns and a tail she had."

"'Twas that bleary-eyed idiot of a clerk started it all, I'm told."

"The devil skewer him."

"Maybe she'd turn yet. She hasn't a spice of bigotry in her."

"She wouldn't be the first woman that turned because of a man."

"If it goes to that, I'm told the schools don't belong to the priests at all, but to the government or some high up people."

"Speak low on that, Mrs. Maloney. Jack warned me it's a thing not to be talked about freely, though, in the next breath, he said if the people was worth their salt they'd have a say in the schools themselves."

"Religion is a queer thing, glory be to God, putting between people."

"It's a fearsome world we're living in, the Lord between us and all harm."

"When a man can't choose out a wife for himself, without losing his bread by it."

"God protect——"

"And bless and save us this day, amen."

"Did you see Mary Blake about it at all, Mrs. Maloney? She could throw many a light on it."

"Amn't I straining my eyes at her all this day? Sitting tight the whole family are, in the side seat next the altar, where no one'd have the courage to talk to them—except the master, and he's a touch-me-not above in the north gallery."

"Poor people! there's trouble on them."

"If there is itself they might share it with a neighbour," Mrs. Maloney said, tossing her head.

In the porch, Matsey Boylan pulled the bell rope. For a minute he tugged and writhed without a sound. The first clear stroke lifted him off his feet and he bobbed round like a monkey. "Take it easy, Matsey," some one said, as the congregation again crowded into the church. "Keep clear of me," he shouted as he rose, circled, and fell a dozen times, and then, "Take hold of me, and stick on, and stop her."

From the top step of the altar, in cope and mitre, his crozier in hand, Dr. Hannigan preached a combined visitation and confirmation sermon. Cordial relations, he was glad to say, existed between the priests and people of the parish—except in one small matter which it devolved on him to deal with, and which, he hoped, would be easily adjusted. For the rest, there was abundant evidence of zeal. He was glad that a hint he threw out at a previous visitation was about to bear immediate fruit. The sadly needed spire was to be put in hand at once. Even before a public appeal had been made generous subscriptions had been forthcoming. He would only read out three as an example. The generous parish priest, a hundred pounds. Mr. Clancy, whose munificent charity was already exemplified by the beautiful stained-glass window at his back, a hundred pounds. And Mr. Michael Blake—he paused significantly—fifty pounds. To the congregation he would say “go and do likewise,” and to the zealous parish priest “procede et prospere.” Before passing on to his special address to the children he would make one other remark—and the subscription list he had just read proved its truth. Where religion was concerned, and the honour of God’s house, good Irish Catholics, priests and laymen, and it was not for him to say that they were the salt of the earth, sank all differences, public and private, and were one in heart and mind and act in promoting the glory of God. . . .

Father Delahunty’s face wore a puzzled frown. In a seat near the sacristy door Father Cassidy whispered excitedly to Father Malone. Mike Blake’s stolid, tanned face grew a brick red. His eyes blinked. “That was a queer trick to play,” Mrs. Blake said under her breath, her eyes on the

rosary, which she held between her fingers in her lap. "Don't pretend to notice, for I feel the eyes of the congregation on us." There was a whispered hum all over the church. The bishop had twice to repeat "My most dearly beloved children." Even then, Hinnissey whispered—

"Mike must have done it to buy Maurice out of his trouble."

"Connected or no, I'll never forgive him for starting such a high tariff," Larry Reardon said.

"Mike, of his own option, to start a tariff, high or low!" Hinnissey said sceptically. "Take it easy now, Larry, and reason it out. Believe you me, there's more in this than meets the eye."

But here the bishop paused expectantly. Behind his back Father Mahon gesticulated wildly, as if beating down the conversation with the open palms of his extended hands.

Driscoll's eyes met Maurice's with an inquiring look. He shook his head. Throughout the sermon that followed, while the bishop signed the children with the sign of the cross and confirmed them with the chrism of salvation, the question kept recurring to his mind in a hundred different forms—Why had his father, who couldn't well afford it, done this, and at this time? But he could find no satisfactory answer. On his way out of the church he met his father and mother and Tom's wife. His mother said, "Well, Maurice, boy?" Minnie gave him a sympathetic look, and hung her head shyly. His father said gruffly—

"As you are going to see the bishop, you might as well walk that bit of the way with us."

One neighbour said, "Good luck to you." Another, "I hope to God you'll come out on top."

No one tried to stop them, though all eyes followed them curiously. When they got beyond the crowd at the gate, Mike said—

"You're wondering, I doubt, about that money? Though I think you're a fool itself, the way you're pushing things now, I'd have you to know that I didn't give it lately, either to spite you, or to curry favour for you with Father James neither, in your foolery. 'Twas a foolish enough investment I made a time ago. Wasn't it, Mary?"

"It was then—and maybe not so foolish either," Mrs. Blake said hopefully.

Maurice said, with relief, "I'm glad you told me this."

They walked on in silence. At the gate of the parochial house Mike said impressively—

"This is the last word I'll say to you now you're going in to your doom. Give up that girl and all your nonsense, and keep the grace of God, and common-sense and the good-will of the priest about you. For reasons best known to myself I'm thinking he'll take back his word about the school if you give in on the girl. There isn't a woman in the world worth giving up all you have for, and, mark my words, there's as good fish in the sea as ever was caught." With this, Mike stalked off frowning.

"Speak as wisely as you can, Maurice, agra, to the holy man—he has the look of a saint on him, thanks be to God. And I'll be saying round and round of the beads for you," his mother said.

Tom's wife lingered.

"How are you, Minnie?" Maurice asked.

"Grand, thank God," she said blushing. She put out her hand impulsively and pressed his. "Tom and Hanny and myself are with you, no

matter how the wind blows," she said eagerly; "and your mother, I think, though she says little and has to be humouring Mike, who's cut to the heart about your losing the school—you know how his mind runs on the money. Alice is worth daring a good deal for," she added.

Maurice walked on a few steps to avoid the bishop's brougham, which he saw approaching. As it was after three, in a few minutes he followed the bishop and Father Mahon into the parochial house, and was shown into the study. The bishop was alone, seated in an armchair in front of the fire, reading his breviary. His purple biretta was well back off his high forehead. The long tassels of his sash, hanging negligently over an arm of the chair, glowed in a bar of light that came through the corner of the window. His heavy gold chain, the gold cross on his breast, his amethyst ring, and the brown hairs on the backs of his fingers, sparkled in the sun. He looked up for a moment as Maurice entered, gave him a friendly smile, and pointing to an armchair at the corner of the fender, said—

"One moment, Mr. Blake, while I finish compline."

He read for three or four minutes, stood up, knelt for a few seconds on his chair, in silent prayer. When he got off his knees he held out his hand to Maurice, who had also risen.

"Do sit down again," he said, as Maurice knelt and kissed his ring. "You don't mind the fire? I got chilled this morning—this unhappy dispute of Father Mahon's was on my mind, too."

Maurice opened his lips to speak.

"Not a word for a moment," Dr. Hannigan waved his hand with a smile.

He leant well back in his chair and joined his hands on his breast, his long capable forefingers pointed upwards.

"I want you to feel—I'm sure you feel—that in this matter I'm no mere judge. All my people are dear to me—my teachers are especially dear. I want you to feel that I am a father and a friend rather than a judge. Indeed, the law of the land does not recognize me as a judge in disputes of this kind—the manager is supreme. But a higher law, the law of charity, constrained my brother bishops and myself to arrogate—some would say," he smiled deprecatingly—"this function to ourselves. In a well-ordered state education would be entirely in the hands of—of the hierarchy. Unhappily—but why dwell on that? The law gives the manager large discretionary power. But the divine economy gives me the right, no matter what the law says, of counselling and advising and"—he hesitated and smiled—"of counselling and advising our clerical managers. But this is a long preamble. Among friends there is no need to speak of powers and rights." He bent his great eyes towards Maurice appealingly. "Two of my children have a misunderstanding, two of my helpers in the training of our Catholic youth—how zealous they are the examination in the church to-day proved; your school, if I may say so without flattery, in particular. Naturally they come to me to help them in their difficulty." He paused and gazed at the fire.

The smooth, level tone of the bishop's voice and his composed features disturbed Maurice. If there was one thing he hated above all others, it was the power of the priests and bishops over education, and the way in which it was exercised. He had often

discussed it bitterly with Driscoll and other teachers. He disliked intensely much of what the bishop said. But Dr. Hannigan's manner was disarming. The slight harshness in his voice had a ring of friendliness, and his eyes were soft and kind. Perhaps he was different from others! His effusive speech might be only a mannerism. Maurice looked again at the ivory forehead, and let his eyes wander over the face, pallid and regular, the eyes a shade close together. It was a kind face, he decided doubtfully—on the whole, he qualified his judgment, on noticing for the first time a slight stricture of the lips which brought out their thinness, revealed a few tight lines at the corners and hardened a rather prominent chin. As he looked the face softened, and Dr. Hannigan began to speak again.

"I read over your statement carefully—and I have heard Father Mahon. Let me say at once that I acquit you of the moral charge. The evidence was negligible. A slight indiscretion on your part; a little over-zeal on his—the whole thing vanishes in a puff of smoke. Though for the future I should advise care. The noble teaching profession has a great responsibility—to ward off from innocence the very shadow of sin."

Maurice's brow contracted.

"I am finding no fault with you," the bishop said quickly. "A counsel of perfection, merely. Though this is the first time I've met you I've heard of you a good deal. There were a few minor charges," he added thoughtfully, "disobedience, faults of manner and of temper." He sighed. "To these we are all subject. Human nature is weak. Cumulatively they have some force—singly I make light of them, except, perhaps, the disobeying

of written orders once—I forget in regard to what—some meeting? I have the papers here, but it does not matter.”

Maurice envied his fluency of speech. He felt strangled, as if a soft silken cord was being wound tightly round him, depriving him of thought and words.

“He had no power to give that order,” he blurted out roughly. The contrast between his own voice and the bishop’s made him ashamed as soon as he had spoken.

“Power,” the bishop said reproachfully. “I thought we agreed to eliminate that word? Powers and rights surely need not be mentioned between a good Catholic and his parish priest. Ah, Mr. Blake, we are living in difficult times, when it behoves us all to pull together—even by yielding a little. I myself have to submit my will often to my brother bishops, often to higher powers. It brings home to me my unworthiness, and gives me a much-needed lesson in humility. Our Holy Church and our holy faith ought to be above all! Such artificial secular distinctions as manager and teacher ought to be forgotten in our common obligation of working together as good soldiers of Christ.”

“Father Mahon did not forget them,” Maurice said dryly.

“You are still bruised in spirit—a little in temper perhaps. Poor fellow! I can well understand it. But are you fair to Father Mahon? He was, I feel sure, thinking of higher things, things of God, of the spirit, of the soul—of your soul.”

The memory of his interview with Father Mahon came back to Maurice. He looked at the bishop keenly—that calm face could not be the cause of the

anger that filled him to his finger-tips. He gave a short uncomprehending laugh.

The bishop's eyebrows lifted almost imperceptibly for a moment.

"The marriage you proposed?" he said gently.

"He had made up his mind before he heard of the marriage."

The bishop's lips tightened. But his eyes smiled as he said—

"This is not a civil court, Mr. Blake—nor a court at all indeed, only a friendly conversation. If Father Mahon were a mere secular manager this marriage might not be relevant. But what do we find? Try and put yourself in his place, Mr. Blake—a zealous priest charged with safeguarding the religion of his people, of the little children in his schools, and above all, of his teachers—for on them devolves the instruction of the children."

"He dismissed me from a secular, undenominational school, not for any lack of fitness or qualification, but because I asked for a dispensation to marry a Protestant," Maurice said coldly.

A slight frown, faint as the shadow of a tiny passing cloud on a field of corn waving in the sunlight, moved rapidly over the bishop's face and seemed to run down his soutane to his feet, as if in physical protest against the crudity of Maurice's statement.

"Secular? undenominational?" he said with a smile. "Surely these are only legal fictions?"

"Unfortunately, my lord."

The bishop seemed to bite the inside of his lip. He gazed thoughtfully at the fire. When he spoke again he had shifted his ground.

"Do you prefer this—this young lady to your religion?" he asked abruptly.

Maurice blushed, hesitated, and then said shortly.

"I don't see that they conflict."

"It is no fault of yours, of course," the bishop said sadly, "that you are not well grounded in the philosophy and theology of our religion. When a Catholic marries a Protestant there is necessarily, at the very least, a certain amount of toleration of heresy. Now we may tolerate heresy from motives of expediency—the difficulty of doing otherwise, the greater good of the Church, and other reasons—but the toleration that marriage involves, no matter how strictly the Church hedges it round with precautions——" he shook his head several times. "Believe me, Mr. Blake—and this is why our Holy Church discourages mixed marriages—it saps the very bases of morality and religion. Come, now," with an appealing look, "love is here to-day and away—who knows?—to-morrow. Like a good Catholic make a willing sacrifice of the temporal to the eternal—I hear the priests coming in to dinner, and they have had a hard day. We must hurry. Make this sacrifice on the altar of your faith—it may be hard, but your reward will be the greater. A teacher in a Catholic school! for it is that, no matter what the law pretends. You surely see now that it is impossible that Father Mahon could allow you to marry out of the faith. With his passionate attachment to the Church too! Have sense, and your good priest will forgive you. Give up this idea, and—I shall make it all right with Father Mahon—go back to your school. Some day, when this madness has passed, you will see in him your best friend."

A feeling of intense weariness overcame Maurice at the beginning of the bishop's long exhortation.

Words, words, words battered his confused brain. He watched the brown eyes, soft and gentle. A few times the grey showed hard and steely. So the bishop too, with all his soft words, was trying to separate him from himself—for Alice was himself. His muscles stiffened and he sat alert in his chair. At the last reference to Father Mahon he laughed harshly.

Dr. Hannigan frowned. The grey in his eyes predominated as he looked questioninglly at Maurice. There was a knock at the door. He said "Come in" sharply.

The servant curtsied and said timidly, "Your lordship, his reverence told me to say the priests were gathered and the dinner ready to be dished, and would you be long, my lord?"

"Tell them wait," he said curtly.

"Well?" he said, when she had shut the door behind her.

"I'll give up the school rather than give her up."

A slight flush appeared on the bishop's neck under his ears. His face was calm but it became sharper in outline.

"And your religion?"

Maurice laughed and said, "Really? my lord."

The bishop looked at him sternly. "There seems to be nothing more," he said dryly.

"The dispensation?"

"That, you apply for through Father Mahon." He took his breviary off the arm of the chair and made a movement as if to stand up. Maurice rose.

"But he referred me to your lordship."

"I'm afraid I can do nothing," he pursed his lips. "You might apply direct to Rome."

"Am I likely to get it there?"

The bishop considered this gravely. "Frankly, no—taking into account Father Mahon's attitude, and the absence, as far as I can see, of the canonical causes for dispensing."

"Good-bye, my lord, and thank you."

"Good-bye," the bishop said coldly.

"Am I dismissed then?" Maurice asked, turning at the door.

"I don't see that I can interfere. Stay—just a minute." His eyes sought inspiration in the carpet. "Yes—I *might* get Father Mahon to withdraw the dismissal and accept your resignation—if you tender it suitably. It might help you to another school—in some other diocese."

"Should I get the dispensation there?"

"I should say not," Dr. Hannigan said irritably.

"I'd rather be dismissed," Maurice said firmly.

"Does that mean that you will take the case into a civil court?" Dr. Hannigan said suspiciously as he rose.

"No."

Maurice was again putting out his hand for the door handle, when the bishop laid a hand on his shoulder, and with a return to his gracious manner said—

"I shall pray for you. I am told that there are good openings for talented young men in America or the colonies."

"Or in Timbuctoo," Maurice said under his breath, smiling pleasantly in response to the bishop's "God bless you."

CHAPTER XVIII

THERE was much excitement in the parish during the time Maurice remained in Bourneen. Two days after he saw the bishop Alice went back to Dublin. He was glad she was out of hearing of all the gossip. In every house "the row" was discussed, wildly and imaginatively, for the actual details were known only to a few. It was generally agreed that Maurice was a "wronged man," though there was some doubtful shaking of heads. Father Malone drove hopefully to Liscannow to interview the bishop, and came back despondent. Hinnissey spoke of resolutions of sympathy from the League, but Father Mahon, who was honorary president, attended the meeting called for the purpose, and nothing was done. Mike Blake blustered a good deal to his wife, lamented his fifty pounds as thrown into a bog-hole, blamed Maurice, dressed half a dozen times in his Sunday clothes for a visit to the parochial house ; but, always, his courage failed, and he laid them aside without going. "After all, I did give the money for the spire," he explained to his wife, "and I'd be only coming back with my tail between my legs." She paid a daily visit to the chapel and burnt many candles in front of the statue of St. Antony, entreating him to find her son a school, "or to comfort his heart anyway." At a bank meeting a fisherman from the Strand called loudly

for a declaration in favour of Maurice ; but the chairman reluctantly ruled the discussion out of order, as being "on the mearing of religion," and, therefore, forbidden by the rules. John Crawford's only contribution was a remark, thrown out occasionally between two long tracts of silence as he sat smoking before the fire at night, "There's nothing I'd put beyond a priest—not all of them, but most." Tom Blake was roused to fury. He had arranged for the barricading of the school against the new teacher, when Maurice heard of the scheme, and, with much difficulty, dissuaded him from it. Many murmured against clerical control of the schools. A dozen children were withdrawn by their parents from Bourneen, sent to the Strand school and to Drusheen, beyond the bog. Father Mahon, when he heard this, drove to both schools, to the Strand in the morning and to Drusheen in the afternoon of the same day, and herded the children back to Bourneen at the point of the whip. The Government Inspector of Schools shook his head angrily at the tale of Maurice's dismissal, muttered "those managers, those managers," and later, dined amicably with Father Mahon. Teachers, for miles around, visited Maurice in the night and counselled resistance, with apologies for the inaction of their local organization. "You know how it is," seemed to most of them to be both excuse and explanation. One was more explicit : "If we say a word in public, out we may go ; but you—you can't be in much worse case than you are. Though we're weighed down with charges of one kind and another, as far as a trifle goes towards expenses—in private, you understand?—you could count on us. And Driscoll within"—he was ill in bed with arthritis

since the day of the confirmation—"could help openly. He's on a pension and clear of a manager. It'd be a great chance of showing things up."

But Maurice was not in the mood to show things up. Perhaps he felt queer, he thought, because Alice had gone, or because Driscoll was ill. He was seeing things differently too, noticing things that escaped him before, seeing himself, even, in a curiously detached, impersonal way—mere little flashes that were contradictory, or vanished when he tried to analyse them. As when he saw himself a spar of wreckage cast up on the beach, and, the next moment, riding the waves triumphantly, with a firm foothold on the same spar. The teacher's words recalled this image. It explained so much that had been puzzling him in the attitude of people. He was a broken man, useful for leading some sort of forlorn hope, but broken. It showed clearly behind all Father Malone's nervous sympathy, in his mother's despondent prayers, in his father's grumbling, in the almost despairing look that he sometimes surprised in Driscoll's eyes when he thought he was unobserved. Surely they were all wrong, and Alice was right. He saw her again as the train bore her away from Liscannow Station, her look of infinite hope and faith, and her last words, "You are a free man now."

When he reasoned his position out, and thought of the future, the fears of his friends depressed him. But not for long. Alice's faith and some feeling that was deep down in his own heart came to his rescue. Suddenly the conviction seized him, that it was he who was free, and they who were in bond. They bowed down under a fear from which he had freed himself. One day he met Teigue Donlon, on

the road near his house. Teigue pressed his hand warmly and said, "The feeling of the people is with you." Father Mahon approached in his trap. Teigue slunk off up the boreen. Maurice met the priest's scowling face with a smile. He felt stronger as he walked on. Once he, too, should have been afraid . . . as an unbroken man he often had the timidity of a mouse . . . as a broken man he had the courage of a giant refreshed. . . .

Tom was his great comfort in those days. Tom had no fear of anything but Minnie's coming motherhood, and that fear was only momentary, and faded away in the larger hope of safety, and a son.

"You have two strong arms on you," he said, "and you're sure to find work. You're out of the swing now, but you'll get into it again. Alice is a kind of smothering now—I know it all—but soon she'll be like another arm or another lung—as natural as the day, and a help and not a hindrance. You'll want to be doing things again, and more of them. Have a drive at politics now—there's an opening. It ought to come easy to a fellow like you that has things printed in the papers—though the same papers!——"

He shook his head gloomily. "But the country'll right itself. It's sick, very sick, but it has the seeds of health in it. *The Star of Liberty* now, that your little stories—they're not bad in their way—come out in. Between you and me it's damn rotten. If you could only get writing something near the truth in that paper now, you might do a great deal of good. . . ."

"Oh yes, we're doing things all right—mucking about," he said again. "It's all to the good. The country is getting richer and we're learning the Irish.

But a man wants to be able to say out what he thinks. There are a lot of fellows thinking the same as me. Take your own case now. Sacked from your job without rhyme or reason, and the whole country afraid to open their lips about it. And if there was a word said, your blessed *Star of Liberty*'d stand by Father James to-morrow. No wonder the Protestants'd be afraid of Home Rule. Not but they're wrong entirely, though it's hard to make 'em see it, and the things they see happening round them. I'm not agin priests, mind you. They baptized me and married me and I hope they'll bury me. It does me a power of good to go to a mass that Father Malone says. He's one of the kind of priests we want—though I wish in a way he had more pluck—priests that you'll be able to see religion and not the tyrant in everything they say and do, and not slim ones either like the bishop that was here the other day. I stood at the back of the chapel for a minute listening to him. Did you hear him about my father's subscription? It near made me sick. How they ever worked it out of him passes me. He's as deaf as a post when I ask him about it."

Then his optimism would take hold of him again. "If only once we could get Home Rule everything'd be right. The schools'd be taken out of the hands of the Father Mahons. There'd be no more breeding of bad will between Protestants and Catholics. No man'd be down on another because of a difference of religion. If you could do something to bring this about," he said with shining eyes, "you'd be doing the best work a man could set his hand to. I haven't the education," he added sadly, "only what Driscoll gave me—far be it from me to belittle it, for he put many a good thought into my

head. But you know a power from all you read, and the College and the like. You'll be up in Dublin doing great things, and maybe I'll be plodding away down here. Who knows," he wound up wistfully, "what we mightn't do between us, big and small?"

Maurice thought it all over at night while Driscoll slept. What could he do? Tom thought him so learned, and he was so ignorant. All those men who worked on newspapers knew Latin and Greek and thousands of things, that he had hardly heard of. *The Star of Liberty* itself often gave a Latin quotation not to be found at the end of Nuttall's English Dictionary—the only Latin, except the list of roots in the spelling-book, that he knew. But he knew Irish, and he knew something of what people were doing and thinking in the country. He already had his column in *The Star*. A pound a week was a great thing. But there was Alice? Calculation of the cost of living pushed aside his ideals for the moment. That pound wasn't a certainty either. Fortunately he had some of his salary of the last two years. He had put it by to pay Driscoll for a share in the expenses of the cottage. But Driscoll had always refused it. He felt so hurt the last time it was offered, that Maurice promised not to speak of it again. It was nearly eighty pounds—a small fortune, he thought cheerfully for a moment. He calculated again, with pencil and paper, and sighed. He leant his arms on the table and stared at the glow of the firelight on the lustre jugs on the dresser. After all, *The Star* might solve everything. The editor had written him flattering letters. Perhaps he would give him more work?

In this nebulous state of mind as to his future

Maurice set out for Dublin. One morning early, while yet the sun struggled with a thin autumn haze he drove with Driscoll, on one of Clancy's side-cars, to catch the first train from Liscannow. His tin trunk and two boxes of books were on ahead, in a cart driven by Tom.

"Wrap the rug well round you," Driscoll said, and fell into a doze.

They sat together on one side of the car, the driver on the other. Driscoll, though very ill, had insisted on coming. His peaked, livid face, as he sat huddled up in the back of the seat, was the worst blow of a hard parting. All the more because, for the last few days, he had tried to be cheerful. His hearty laugh became forced, and deepened the lines about the corners of his lips. "All is for the best," became a refrain, that cut Maurice like a whip every time he heard it. If only the old man had blamed him it would have been easier to leave. Milk carts passed, with a rattle of tins, on the way to the creamery, the drivers calling, "God speed you," or "Good luck to you." Men, early afield, digging potatoes, waved a hand or a spade or a hat. A collie of Teigue Donlon's followed the car, wagging his tail, for a hundred yards. Slieve Mor pushed its massive outline through the haze now shot with colour. The heavy rime on the leafless trees began to sparkle. The old mill wheel, green with slime, a gate, a stream, a stunted tree, smoke rising, in a snaky whorl, from a gable on which he had played handball as a boy—all had some association that made the drive more bitter for Maurice than the good-byes of last night.

All Driscoll said on the platform was "You have a home with me whenever you want it."

The memory of him, leaning heavily on Tom's arm, his eyes fixed on the receding train, remained with Maurice throughout the journey. He longed to be back again at the school, watching Driscoll give the open-air lesson in the garden, with the fishermen on the shore, at the Irish class, listening to Jim Mescall's fiddle. Yet it was Driscoll himself who had said : "You don't fit in here any more—you'd best to go,"—and Alice would be at Kingsbridge station awaiting him. . . .

She wanted to know all about Driscoll. "Who is to look after him?" "Hanny will go down every day—and there's Bessy Reilly."

"That is something ; I must write to her. And you must write to him often. Your heavy things must go by the carrier ; we must be economical, so we can't afford a cab. I've found the very room for you—between Fairview and Drumcondra—a bed-sitting-room—and not far from us. Mother wants you to come straight to us and have some food—you must be famished ; but we'll take in your place on the way. Eight shillings a week—it's the cheapest I could get of the kind. Coals are extra, but you'll only pay for what you use. The great thing is that I know Mrs. Reed—she'll look after you well."

She said this in snatches as he arranged about his luggage. They took the tram along the quay to O'Connell Bridge. Though he had to carry a heavy bag they walked to the Pillar. "Twopence saved—we'll want it more than the tram company."

"You're in a managings mood," he said grimly, as they stood waiting for the tram.

"I am," she said demurely. "I proposed to you, you know. I——" She blushed crimson.

"I hope you'll like my mother," she said inconsequently.

She was silent until they arrived at Mrs. Reed's door. He hardly noticed that she did not speak. It was enough that she was near him. He looked often out of the window at the half-familiar streets, but it was more to catch the line of her face under her fur toque.

He liked the house, and Mrs. Reed, and his room. It was an old ramshackle cottage, with a wooden porch that might have come from Bourneen. So might Mrs. Reed, with her ample waist and florid untownlike face. She came from Drimna, she told him in a few minutes, "and though it's near forty years ago I never took to city ways. And what's more, I can't abide their eggs." The room was large and clean, with windows back and front "that keep out the rain," Mrs. Reed said, "but—I wouldn't be telling a lie about it—not always the draught. But sorra bit you'll feel that, if you only pull the curtains." Strips of carpet were in front of the bed, the fireplace, and the dressing-table. A table and chair filled in the space between the head of the narrow iron bedstead and the wall. "Hearing you were a writing gentleman I put it there to keep you out of the wind," Mrs. Reed said. She looked him over. "You have the air of the country about you, like myself," she said confidentially. "I can't stand people with town airs on them, so I think we'll suit each other well. And if you care for a fresh egg with your breakfast, I have them of my own laying—you can hear a hen clucking in the yard this minute."

As they walked across to Drumcondra, Alice said, "I thought you'd feel more at home there."

The little one-storied cottage, off the high-road beyond Drumcondra, to which she took him was not unlike Mrs. Reed's. But paint and whitewash did much to conceal dilapidation. The roof of small slates, from constant patching with mortar, was almost as white as the walls. Mrs. Barton opened the door and welcomed Maurice quietly. He followed her with his eyes as she moved about, with Alice, preparing high tea. And sometimes, when he had looked away for a moment and sought her again, he found her eyes fixed on him inquiringly. Her black dress, her brown hair with streaks of grey in it, parted in the middle and worn flat, her calm forehead, her eyes that seemed of great depth because of shadows under the lids, were out of keeping with the tawdry bamboo furniture. He was puzzled by something familiar in her. He imagined her in John Crawford's kitchen, a softer suggestion of John, where she seemed more at home. It was then he recognized that she was Alice grown older, and somehow it made him glad.

During tea, if the conversation wandered from Bourneen, she always brought it back with "the threshing now? Do they still make a great night of it?" or "Do the hurts grow as well as they used to by the Reardons' big dyke?" And always a little wistfully. After tea, when Alice had gone to the kitchen to wash up, she put her hand on Maurice's, and said timidly, "I'm glad." She hesitated, kissed him on the forehead, and talked of her poultry. Afterwards she went out "to see to the fowl," she said, and left them alone. The room was dark in the twilight. Alice poked the fire. The flame lit up her face and played on the bright polish of the furniture. "Shall I light——" she said, looking at him.

Their lips met. Her head rested on his shoulder and her hair nestled against his chin. They sat in front of the fire, and he told her what he saw in her eyes and hair, and in the dimples in her cheeks. She watched the fire with her lips slightly parted.

"It's very foolish," she said, "but say more of it."

Mrs. Barton brought in a lamp and sat with them, talking of Bourneen till there was a loud knock at the front door.

"Your father," she said guiltily to Alice, "and his supper not ready."

She disappeared to the kitchen, while Alice opened the door.

"Of course, of course. I'll take him as mildly as a kitten," Maurice heard, in a boisterous voice, and wished that he could withdraw through the window.

"Where's this villain that wants to rifle the nest?—not bad, eh? but the wife keeps poultry, you see," Mr. Barton shouted as he entered. "Hullo, my fine fellow!" He crushed Maurice's hand in a big palm and clapped him on the shoulder with the other hand. "Supper not ready! this is nice doings."

Alice ran out to help her mother. Mr. Barton held Maurice away from him at an arm's length. "Hum, hum," he said, a little disapprovingly. He pulled down his own unruffled waistcoat, patted the ends of his frock-coat, and rubbed his fingers purringly over the silk facings.

Maurice was horribly conscious of the slight frown on the handsome, regular, florid face. He could see it even in the well-kept moustache, in the

wavy hair, brushed carefully from the side to hide its thinness, and in the creased trousers that carried the line of the Roman nose down to the highly varnished boots. He looked ruefully at his own rumpled waistcoat and baggy trousers. A thought struck him and he smiled—after all, Alice was more like her mother. He looked up with some confidence, but Mr. Barton's frown had already gone.

"You writing fellows are a caution—I see them sometimes where I peck in the middle of the day—down-in-the-leathers sort of chaps. But there are some—I see one with as natty a silk hat as we ever sold at Scrutton's. That's what you have to aim at. Take my word—I know—I'm not head floor-walker for nothing. Don't be led away by the wife or Alice. They're among the best, but they never learned the value of good window-dressing." He drew himself up and fingered his tie.

"Settled down?"

Maurice was feeling crushed, but he nodded with a smile.

"Well, you'll soon be rolling in the shekels. Alice showed me one or two things in *The Star*—rotten rag. They're not my kind. A little more spice, eh? Still it's a great thing to have one's name in print. I wouldn't wonder if Alice had done well for herself. We'll talk it all out again sometime. I must be off and change these togs—it would never do to sit down in them. Care to look at the racing special? I had a flutter of a shilling in a sweep on the Park Plate to-day, and I won, sir. That gives a man an appetite for his food. Not sorry you dropped the schoolmastering—as for this bother about religion, we make nothing of it at Scrutton's," he added from the door.

Maurice spent a depressed few minutes while Alice and her mother laid the table for a second high tea. Would Mr. Barton be another complication? If he were only like Mrs. Barton? When he found out that he wasn't really a writing fellow? He stood leaning on the mantelpiece with a worried brow.

Alice came in with a dish of bacon and eggs. "Don't look like the grave," she said, smiling as she arranged knives and forks. "If dad bothers you, talk to him about roses—but here he comes."

Maurice drew a breath of relief. The jovial face was there but all the stiff lines had gone from the figure. Mr. Barton's manner had changed with his clothes. The loose grey alpaca jacket, the baggy trousers, the well-worn slippers, the flannel shirt and soft collar made him less loud and assured. Or was it the presence of Mrs. Barton who followed him in?

"If you're trying to keep your trousers straight all day this is a relief," he said, with a glance down his leg.

At supper he asked what his wife had been doing. She told him at some length. He listened appreciatively. Then Alice was put through a catechism.

"Oh, and then you met the train—and after that a blank," he said, with a return of the boisterous manner. He told of the doings at Scrutton's. He was still relating the day's experience to Maurice when Alice and her mother, after washing up, rejoined them in the sitting-room. He waited patiently while they opened work-boxes, then, taking them into the circle with a wave of his hand,

he began again. "What did the manager say to me? 'Barton,' he said——"

Alice snapped a thread on her finger and said quietly—

"Did Maurice tell you, dad, about Mr. Driscoll's roses?"

Mrs. Barton smiled and looked up at her husband affectionately, resting her hands for a moment on her knee. His eyes lit up—Maurice thought how like they were to Alice's with that look.

"No. Why didn't you tell me before—and I making conversation. What sorts has he?"

At ten o'clock Mrs. Barton put away her work. "Maurice must be tired, and you have to be up early, Luke," she said gently.

"Come some Sunday, young man, or a Saturday afternoon, when I'm free of that damn shop, and I'll show you my patch. We keep the country in the town here, don't we, Lizzie?"

His wife smiled.

"*Rus in urbe* the dictionary says. I wanted to paint it on the gate, but the wife and Alice wouldn't let me. You'll do, young fellow. You have my blessing. I must make a note of that tip about grafting. Good night to you, and come soon again."

Alice walked with him to the paling that separated the narrow strip of garden from the road. She locked the little wooden gate for the night. He leant across it looking at the house.

"A house like that would cost a great deal in a dear town like this," he said musingly.

"It wouldn't then—it's old and has no hot water nor, what do they call them? modern contrivances."

"What would we want with them?"

"What, indeed."

"Would you like it to be soon?"

"When you like," she said, hardly above her breath. And then, as he was going, "Only I'd like to live under the mountain beyond Dundrum. There's more air there, and a view of the sea."

CHAPTER XIX

IN a week Alice was to go to Tyrone for a month's lecturing. After that she should be in Dublin for a winter course at Glasnevin. They met every day. In the mornings, muffled in an overcoat and rug, Maurice worked. There were slight frosts at night, his room was cold, and coal was expensive. At half-past one he was always waiting at the end of the Drumcondra tram, and, soon, there was only glorious sunshine. Alice said it was a pity it wasn't summer ; and he, regretting only that the days were not longer, agreed. They explored Green Lanes, Raheny, Finglass, and the Phoenix Park. From Donnybrook they walked along the banks of the Dodder. Twice they took the mountain road from Dundrum, round by the back of St. Columba's College, and back by the Moravian Cemetery. Somewhere between Dundrum and the mountains they were to live, Alice said. And there, on a patch of heath, high above the road, with a clump of ragged fir trees, higher up, between it and the sky, stood the very cottage she had been dreaming of. If it were only empty when

"When?" he often asked himself after Alice had gone ; and his depression answered "never." He sent many articles to *The Star*, but they were returned without a word. He found it hard to write cheerful replies to Alice's spirited letters. Mr.

Barton's boisterous high spirits kept him away from the only people he knew. The city, which he had thought so beautiful, when walking through it with Alice, seemed now a huge sore. All the broken men of the country—like himself, he said bitterly—had drifted there. They hung on the bridges, at public-house doors, round the Pillar, at street corners, or slouched in and out of the battered doorways of old Georgian houses. Was this to be his fate? . . .

One morning, with a rejected manuscript from the office of *The Star of Liberty*, came a letter, signed Louis Breslin, editor, asking him to call that afternoon at four. Was it more work? or was his weekly folk-tale to be stopped? He tried to write, but the paper in front of him remained blank. He thought of the cottage, with its background of firs, and he glowed with hope. His vision faded away in a grey mist, from which emerged a slum palace, in a back street, sordid, grimy faces peering through the few panes that were not stuffed with sacking or boarded up. He shivered and lit the tiny fire Mrs. Reed had laid in the grate. He piled on the whole scuttle of coals and soon had a roaring fire. When Mrs. Reed brought in his dinner she said approvingly—

"A man never did any good without he had some heat in him, and you as thin as a lath too."

The tray was placed on his writing table, where he ate the small chop to which he had limited himself. He gazed hungrily at the bare bone. What matter if he was spending more than he earned—he still had money in the savings bank. He went out to the kitchen and asked for eggs.

At two o'clock he set out for *The Star* office in Harcourt Street. The slob at Fairview seemed to

have lost the horrid smell that had been getting on his nerves. Over the railway embankment he caught a glimpse of laughing waves. A passing train, between the sea and sky on the high, narrow causeway, puffed joyfully. He took the tram to the Pillar and did not see the dingy streets. He got to Sackville Street at half-past two by the post office clock. It was only a quarter of an hour's walk to Harcourt Street, so he had an hour and a quarter to dawdle away. He was looking at some prints in a window when Mr. Barton shouted "Hallo!" from the door of a restaurant near by. "You're a nice fellow—'pon my soul, you are. Deserting us! Ha! ha! There'll be a change, Saturday. Let me whisper—Alice coming home. 'Twas to be a secret from you. We were to march over—take you by surprise. Thought I'd give you a hint—only fair," with a preternaturally sly look that stretched upwards to his glossy hat. He glanced doubtfully at Maurice's boots, at his hat, said "Ta, ta. Scrutton's'll think I am lost," and marched off with his chest well extended.

So that was why Alice asked him not to write, after Friday, till she gave him another address. He gazed at the retreating Mr. Barton and envied him his assurance and self-confidence. If only he had work before she came back. . . .

He walked up and down in front of *The Star* office, with nervous glances at the dingy windows. He felt cold and hot, took out his watch every few minutes, returned to Stephen's Green, walked round the railings twice, went into a tea-shop and ordered tea which he did not take. . . .

At five minutes past four he was shown into the editor's room. The hall and stairs had reminded

him of the slums, but this room was different. He had read of these old houses. He had seen them in almost every street, but had never been inside one. Even in the half light the room gave a feeling of air and space. He was following the line of the cornice when a voice said quietly—

“You like it?”

Maurice looked round. A dapper little man, holding in his hands the ends of a half-unwound white silk muffler, was gazing at him with lazy brown eyes.

“I do—I feel I do. But then, I know nothing of architecture,” Maurice said hesitatingly.

“Ah! that is it—to feel. It is so easy to know,” the other said with more interest.

He unwound the muffler and laid it, beside his hat and overcoat, on a chair. He turned on the lights, poked the fire, asked Maurice to take a chair, and sat himself behind a table covered with papers.

He tapped his well-kept nails with a pencil.

“You never read *The Star of Liberty*,” he said suddenly.

“No—that is sometimes—that is——”

“I know—your own folk-tale in the Friday issue.”

Maurice blushed. Breslin’s eyes were grave, though an ironic smile curled the corners of his lips. “You know the *Satyricon*?” he said dryly.

Maurice looked blank.

“Not Petronius? What a pity. It doesn’t matter. Folk is not a bad substitute. Are you going to live in town? What did you do in the country, by the way?”

Maurice told him; also, in reply to further questions, why he left.

Breslin balanced the pencil on his forefinger. Maurice spoke to the pencil with an occasional look at Breslin's face, at the pallid whiteness of the skin above the closely-trimmed black beard, flecked with grey, at the high forehead, over which a lock of grey hair fell negligently.

"So you were kicked out—I suppose it was better than resigning. Very interesting and—very foolish." He got up and stood with his back to the fire, his hands under his coat-tails. The brown eyes seemed to look through the wall opposite. "I did something of the kind once myself, but it was long—a very long time ago." His eyes dropped to a chair. "That's a good piece of Chippendale?"

Maurice shook his head.

"You write well though. Gad, some of those tales were good—a little Homerish, a hint of Rabelais. That last one held my breath. In a saint's mouth too! The man who tacked a saint's name on to that tale had the irony of Anatole France—it came straight from Olympus or from a lover of Maeve. I split my sides laughing at the chance of putting it on the Reverend breakfast tables under the patronage of St. Patrick himself. It makes me laugh again to think of it." His shoulders moved a little, and the ends of his waistcoat, but there was no sound, nor did his face seem mirthful.

Maurice shrugged his shoulders. "I only translated them," he said simply.

"My dear sir, I didn't say you invented them. If you had—but I'm getting too old for prostrations—and it's bad for one's clothes. But you found the right word—that I'll swear, though I don't know Irish—and that's something."

He moved his chair to the table and sat down

again, pulling his beard softly. "Now about those other things of yours—they won't do at all—you'd know it yourself if you read *The Star* diligently."

"Not good enough?" Maurice said resignedly. "I did my best, though, to make them true to life." He looked at the marble mantelpiece with a puzzled frown.

"Adams," Breslin said. He chuckled, this time audibly. "Truth! ah, indeed, what is it? And you versed in the irony of folk too! Truth! pestiferous thing! a weary search, and the reward—dust and ashes. I told you I tried the game once." He waved his hand round the room, "I had to pawn all these—'twas years before I was able to redeem them. No, my friend, your truth won't do at all—on the subjects of those articles you sent me," he added gravely after a pause. "Priests and politicians and gombeen men!" gazing pensively at the decoration on the ceiling. "All the regular subscribers to *The Star*! The whole truth about them is found in my leading articles. I hold the mirror up to nature—none of your vulgar mirrors that reflect a pimple or a squint or a crooked tie, but a magic mirror." He leant back and stroked his beard. "Hey, presto! I hold it up, and you see men, not perhaps as they are, nor even as they see themselves, but as they wish the world to see them. Who knows?" he added with a shrug.

Maurice laughed. "I'm afraid my things won't do," he said dryly, standing up.

"Don't go yet. I've a few minutes before the infernal grind begins. Sit down a moment. I like your stuff. It's a weakness, of course." He fingered a Georgian inkstand. "Write me a series—I don't see why you shouldn't keep it on indefinitely

—simple, non-controversial things—a threshing, games in the country, a fair, a market, a ceilidhe—the thousand and one things. I warn you, I'll blue pencil anything dangerous. Irony—if you are able and if it is sufficiently elusive—I'd like 'em to have a flavour. Thank God for small mercies," he added whimsically, "the devils aren't too subtle."

"I might try," Maurice said doubtfully.

"Oh, you'll do 'em all right—I've no doubt about that. If you're bursting with what you call the truth—misguided man—there are other rags that would be glad to have it. They won't pay you—poor devils—they're always going smash, but there's always one about. I'm afraid I must begin to work. Call again—I'm free from four to five, or better still, Saturday nights, any hour, at my digs at Dundrum. Supper at seven—bachelor pot luck." He stood up. "Those articles—about fourteen hundred words—one or, maybe, two a week—say a pound each—say thirty shillings. There's the Dundrum address." He shook hands, walked half-way across the room with Maurice, said "a moment," turned back to the desk, took a plain, brown paper covered booklet from under a heap of proofs. "Put it in your pocket—privately printed—those bishops!—selections from Petronius—I envy you the *mot juste* though."

Maurice walked down the stairs half dazed, the beautiful room and the trim Breslin still in his eyes. Surely he was impossible, he thought, as he stood in the grimy hall. Three or four pallid men passed him by and down a long passage to the back—printers, he supposed. When he got to the street, he crossed over and gazed at the dingy house. The light from a street lamp fell on a discoloured

board, under the first-floor windows, "The Star of Liberty," printed on it in large letters. Breslin seemed even more unreal. It was all a joke. And he was to write nice, harmless things! He raged, along the Green, against *The Star of Liberty*, Breslin, bishops, and publicans. In the middle of Grafton Street he was composing a sketch of a country wedding. He liked it. At the gate of Trinity he thought of Alice. He stood gaping at the dimly lighted archway, at other lights beyond, at the uniform of the porter who lounged into the light. That cap—— Why these articles changed his position completely. The realization was a shock. He steadied himself by touching the railings. His fingers tingled. He stuck his hands in his overcoat pocket and walked on. With his folk column—two pounds ten a week, perhaps four pounds. It was wealth untold. More than enough for that cottage. He leant against the parapet of O'Connell bridge and watched the lights, in long broken flames, swaying deep down in the water. And there was still seventy pounds in the savings bank—far more than they'd need for furniture. He walked on. Tram cars flashed gay lights at him. In the dark vault above the wires, the stars had a kind look. He jostled against a soldier and his sweetheart and lifted his hat. "The bloke is blind," in response made him smile. He had got to the top of Sackville Street before he noticed that he had passed the Pillar and his tram. He railed against himself for thinking so much about money. It was an insult to Alice too. He watched people go in to the Gaelic League Rooms. He would take that up again—and other things. And those other papers—what matter if they didn't pay. . . .

He posted the sketch before going to bed. Two days afterwards he had a proof and a note from Breslin : "That's the stuff. Do two a week."

He took the afternoon train to Dundrum. A policeman, busy warming his gloved hands in the waiting-room, knew all about the cottage.

"A lonesome place and windy—they call it 'The Firs'—and to be got for a song, for all the year round. Sonny Fogarty has the letting of it," he said with friendly interest. "I'll show you the way to him."

Maurice saw the cottage—a living room, a scullery, two bedrooms and a loft—under Sonny Fogarty's guidance.

"There's great accommodation in the loft," Sonny said impressively. "You could put this and that in it, or a bed, and be kept warm at night by the heat of the kitchen fire." He waxed eloquent over the eave-shoots, and a green and white water-barrel outside the scullery door, "and the spring well, by the clump of furze beyond, couldn't be beat for coldness even in the middle of summer."

"The sea and the mountains aren't everybody's bargain," Sonny said doubtfully. But Maurice was thinking of Bourneen, of which the sea, stretching away beyond Howth Head, reminded him. His abstraction saved him something in the rent, for Sonny hastened to make apologies for mountain and sea. "Nearly always, they are as quiet as a lamb, and if they'd get headstrong itself, why, with the porch in front, and the way the door is set in it, and the scullery behind, not a breath can come at you." As Maurice still made no sign, he went on excitedly, the fat shaking in waves all over his enormous figure, for he was six feet two, and broad and deep, "It's

none of them cottages with a clay floor to it, but the best of a boarded floor in the kitchen—sorra quality house in the country has better. And signs on it ladies are running over each other, in the summer months, trying to get it. Real quality, though they often tramp about the grass without a shoe or stocking to their foot—it's a way the quality have if they're given to dabbing paint on a piece of paper and calling it a cow, or the peep of dawn or the like. Howsomever, I don't deny I'd rather a yearly tenant, being a load off a man's mind. What'd you say to ten pounds a year now?"

Maurice said "All right," cheerfully. His ready acceptance depressed Sonny. "It's giving it away, I am," he said, throwing out his hands despairingly, his ridiculous boyish treble taking a sharper note: "all them cupboards in holes and corners, and that grand brick pavement round the fire to warm your toes on of a winter's night, and a gravel path fornint the front door, and—and all the other conveniences." He gave a sigh that shook his whole frame. As they walked back to Dundrum he became more cheerful. "The wife—she's a small woman in size but powerful in the tongue, sorra woman in Dundrum has half her virtue in it—she often says to me by the way of no harm, 'Sonny, you're a fool.' And I wouldn't say but she's right. But then, ten pounds isn't bad for an airy house the like of that, that's too dear for them that it'd suit to take it in the middle of winter, and too small for them that could pay for it." He was still trying to explain this cryptic statement as they signed an agreement. In handing over the key he said timidly, "Meaning no disrespect, but seeing that I don't know you from Adam, would you think it'd be presuming on you to

ask you for a trifle down, to show that you're in earnest?"

Maurice walked home. Now and again he put his hand in his pocket and fingered the key with a feeling of satisfaction. It was a gloomy walk, between high demesne walls, dimly lit at long intervals by gas lamps, but his feet struck the road cheerfully. He saw the stars and was happy. Alice was coming on Saturday. Poor old Driscoll—they would have him up to stay with them. He laughed at the recollection of Father Mahon. The laugh died away thinly and his steps became slower. It flashed through his mind that he was not yet done with Father Mahon. He touched the key again, but it had lost its power of assurance. He had the house, but was not yet married. There was still the dispensation to get. The high walls took on a sinister aspect. He stood for a moment at the frowning entrance to a big demesne. He idly wondered who lived there. Then he laughed harshly. It was a convent, of course, or a monastery. All the big places round Dublin were occupied by priests or nuns. The long arm of Father Mahon stretched everywhere. Resignation was preached to those wretches in the slums from these palaces. But this mood did not last long. Some inborn instinct, of his faith or his peasant training, made him take off his hat almost unconsciously and say reverently, "May God forgive me for criticising them." Driscoll often said, too, that "one wasn't to judge the old faith by its priests, and if it went to that, some of them were as good as you'd meet in a day's walk." All the same, he thought one would have more trust in them if they were a little more like the religion they professed. There he was at his criticising

again ! He stepped out quickly to shake off these thoughts. The next convent wall brought them back. Lamps became more frequent. A tram was standing at the end of a track. He entered it. The lights, and two old women discussing a rise in the price of sugar, made him calmer. He bought an evening paper and tried to read it, but the dispensation worried him. He would see some priest about it. They were not all Father Mahons. That old friar, to whom he had been to confession in the church off the quay, seemed kind. The tram began to move. He held the paper open in front of him, but, over it, he studied intently an advertisement of some desiccated soup, which appeared and disappeared as the heads of the old women opposite bobbed up and down. . . .

He got off the tram at O'Connell Bridge and was soon in the church. A few lights struggled against the dust, and a haze that came in from the river. Several people were praying in the nave. The seats round the confessionals, in the aisles, were packed. He wondered why there were so many people, till he remembered that it was the eve of the first Friday of the month. He prayed awhile, and took his place in the queue at Father Evangelist's box. As penitent after penitent was heard he moved up slowly on the long seat, nearer to the confessional. The dark shadows, the muttered prayers, the jingling of beads, the click of the slides of the confession boxes, the immense indrawn sigh that seemed to fill the gaunt, stuffy church, made him impatient and irritable. . . .

Father Evangelist opened the slide and blessed him.

"How long since your last confession ?"

"I don't want confession. It's about a marriage. How is a Catholic to get a dispensation to marry a Protestant?" he said hesitatingly.

The old priest lifted the curtain in front of the box, so that the dim light shone a little on Maurice's face. He peered closely.

"Hum, hum. Well, well. What a question to pop at a man. Maybe, you'd better make your confession after all—I'd be better able to advise you."

"I only want to know how to get the dispensation."

"Well, I'm hurried anyway to-night," the priest said with a sigh. "Look for it, you mean—for you might get it or you might not. It's not as easy here as in some other places. But that's neither here nor there, for we poor friars have nothing to say to it. The seculars keep the like of that to themselves. Go to your parish priest, my son, and he'll tell you what to do or what not to do in the matter. Doing nothing is often the wisest in an affair of the kind. Where do you live now?"

Maurice told him.

"Oh, that's Father Cafferley—a wise man. See him. God bless you, my son." He waved his hand as he shut the slide.

It was not much progress, Maurice thought, as he left the church, but at least he knew whom to ask. When he reached his lodgings he found a letter from Alice. She and her father were coming to tea with him on Saturday. At first she intended to surprise him, but it would be dreadful if he should not be at home, or if there was no plum cake. He forgot the dispensation in a discussion with Mrs. Reed on the possibilities of the tea.

"Of course, 'tis no trouble at all," she said, looking round the room critically. "A screen I have without can be put round the bed, and the wash-stand hid behind it. And I'll bring in my best cups and teapot, and make a real country cake for ye."

"A plum cake?" he said diffidently.

"I would and welcome," she said doubtfully, "but it has a habit of never rising for me. You'd best buy it. It's better to be sure than sorry."

He wrote to Alice to Tyrone, and another note to Drumcondra, lest she might miss the first. He sat for a couple of hours over a sketch for Breslin, but the thought of seeing Father Cafferley, and the tea, kept the end of his pen against his teeth. He threw it down on an unfinished page and went to bed.

Though he dreamed of the tea, Father Cafferley occupied his mind when he awoke. At breakfast he inquired of Mrs. Reed where the parish priest lived. For the first time he learned that she was not a Catholic.

"I am not his kind," she said, "but to be sure I know his house well—a decent looking, distant man that keeps himself to himself."

At ten o'clock, following Mrs. Reed's elaborate directions, he set out by the priest's house. As he rang the door opened, and a smartly dressed, elderly priest stood on the threshold. He looked at Maurice keenly, said "Well?" and began to button a grey suède glove.

"Father Cafferley?"

"Your business? I'm in a hurry—just going into town."

"May I have a few minutes——"

"You've wasted that already—surely one of the curates will do, they are inside."

"I would rather speak to you."

Father Cafferley made a gesture of impatience, adjusted his well-ironed hat to a slightly rakish angle, brushed a speck of dust off a boot with the glove he had not yet put on, looked at Maurice superciliously, and said sharply—

"This is—come in here." He banged the door, and led the way into a small room in which there was a desk and a bookcase. "Well?" he said again, standing with his hat on, and folding his umbrella with neatness and precision.

Maurice was fascinated by the glossy figure, by the gloss of the hat, of the freshly shaven face, of the collar, of the satin stock, of the clothes, of the heavy gold watchchain, of the pointed boots. Even the umbrella was covered with some glossy stuff that reflected the light. It was folded to a thin stick as Maurice said—

"I want a dispensation for a mixed marriage. Could I trouble——"

"Do you belong to this parish?"

"I lodge in Briar Lane."

"Oh, there!" with another look at Maurice's clothes. "With whom?"

"Mrs. Reed."

Father Cafferley pursed his lips, his snub nose inclining upwards thoughtfully.

"Don't know her. A Catholic?"

"I believe not."

"Oh!" lowering his voice an octave. "A lodger, you say? Here to-day and away to-morrow, and bothering me! It is really too bad, my good man. But everybody in this world is unreasonable.

You come from the country I see by"—his eyes said "clothes"—"by your accent." He spoke himself as if he suffered from adenoids. "You have a parish priest of your own, I presume? Go to him."

"He has refused me."

"Oh! Who is he?"

"Father Mahon, of Bourneen, near Liscannow."

Father Cafferley pursed his lips again. "I know him well—a most respectable and distinguished priest, one of the staunchest supporters of our Catholic Truth Society, spoken of for a bish——" His voice had lost its patronizing tone and he spoke sharply. "My good man, this puts an entirely different complexion on the affair. I can do nothing. Do you intend to stay in this parish?" he added doubtfully.

"No."

"Then that settles it," the priest said with relief. "One's own parishioners are bad enough," he continued, with a rising angry inflection, "but every—every man from the whole country comes up here bothering us Dublin priests. Good morning, sir, you've already kept me an unconscionable time." He drew out a heavily cased gold watch. "I've lost ten minutes of my valuable time with you."

Maurice, whose anger was slowly growing, managed to restrain himself. He asked quietly, "Can I get no priest in Dublin to attend to this?" He was retreating backward towards the door, under pressure of the point of the umbrella under Father Cafferley's arm.

"Oh, they might listen to you at the Vicariate."

"Listen?" Maurice said bitterly: "and send the fool further, I suppose."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Father Cafferley laughed, "not bad that. I must tell it to the vicars, they'll enjoy it." They were now at the front door. The priest descended the steps, turned round and said, "The Vicariate," chuckled, set his face gravely, and strutted away along the pavement.

From the top step, a fierce anger clouding his brain, Maurice watched him till he disappeared round a corner. Was it any use going to the Vicariate? he asked himself, without troubling about the reply. He wandered through the streets, seeing nothing. Unconsciously he must have had a purpose, for he found himself inquiring for the Vicariate. A policeman shook his head. "I never heard tell of the like." He asked a sacristan who was beating mats against the railings in front of a church. "The next house," he said.

"The vicars? It isn't their day," the man who opened the door said. Maurice's distraught look must have appealed to him for he added, "But by accident there's one of 'em within—he might see you."

A kind old priest listened patiently to his tale, though, at times, he interjected gently, "This is highly informal, highly informal." When he had heard all the circumstances he said, after some reflection, "You couldn't put a little more pressure on her?—all for the good of her soul, you know."

Maurice shook his head.

The old man spoke, at length, of domiciles and quasi-domiciles, letters of freedom, application direct to Rome, the expense, the necessity of observing an orderly procedure.

"What am I to do then?" Maurice asked, bewildered.

"It's exceedingly complicated," the priest said, and he again gave a long rambling explanation of domicile which Maurice was unable to follow. "So you see, all things considered, far the best thing for you is to make friends with your parish priest in the country. What did you say his name was? Father Mahon—I think I've heard of him. A good man, I'm sure, at the bottom, if you'd only take him the right way."

"So that is all," Maurice said drearily.

"Only that you have my sympathy—any poor fellow in trouble has it," the priest said, rising, "and pray—pray—that's the great thing."

Maurice wandered again through the streets. Somewhere away at the back of his mind there was something worrying him. He knew it was there by a dull ache in the pit of his stomach. But he did not try to bring it into consciousness. Besides, there was so much to see. The surface of his mind was keenly alert. He was interested in the traffic, in a type of van horse that he saw for the first time, in the faces of the crowd. Priests passed—there seemed hundreds of them. For no particular reason that he was conscious of, he looked at them more closely than at the other passers-by. He saw them as so many foppish and jaunty Father Cafferleys, or scowling Father Mahons, or earnest Father Malones. That one had the kind of face of the old vicar, this was like Father Delahunty—he looked for the dogs at his heels and was disappointed at not seeing them. He watched a football match through the college railings, and the gulls wheeling over the river by O'Connell Bridge. . . .

He got home late and worked feverishly far into the night. He was awakened out of a dreamless

sleep by Mrs. Reed's voice shouting through the half-opened door :

"I didn't like to waken you before, you were that sound. But it's near dinner-time—and the people coming to tea, and the room to be done up, and aired. You can make dinner and breakfast of the one meal, and then, be off with you till I settle things up. And don't forget the cake when you're out."

The tea was hardly a success. The plum cake was good. The soda cake was done to a turn. Alice, who arrived looking her best and in high spirits, soon had a sad expression in her eyes. Maurice was moody and depressed to begin with. Mr. Barton's hilarious anecdotes of his life at Scrutton's, when, as a young man, he "lived in," evoked stony smiles from Maurice and made him only more and more silent. Anger pent up in him since he left the Vicariate yesterday, seemed now to choke him. His lips were dry and his tongue stuck to his palate. He wanted to use explosive language, but he had to listen to those stories about Scrutton's. Alice's smiles became fewer and fewer. He caught her looking at him and tried to smile. It must have been a sickly effort, he thought, as he caught her anxious glance a few seconds later. She lowered her eyes quickly and he sat staring at her with a frown. At last Mr. Barton rose.

"A very pleasant visit, Blake. We enjoyed ourselves—eh, Alice?"

"What is it?" Alice asked, lingering behind.

"That damned dispensation," Maurice said angrily.

"Oh, that!" she said with relief. She gave a low laugh. "I'll be at the tram at eleven to-morrow and we can go somewhere."

She had never seemed more desirable, yet he was glad he was alone. He was angry with Barton for coming, though he shrank from the possibility of any intimate talk with Alice. What was he going to do about the marriage? And to-morrow he should have to make some explanation to Alice. He seized his hat and went out. He tried to think, but all sorts of irrelevant details filled his mind—Father Cafferley's gloves and Father Mahon's protruding under-lip and the Adams mantelpiece in Breslin's room. He boarded a passing tram and spelled out the advertisements. At the Pillar he changed into another tram without thinking of where it was going. Alice took it too lightly, he thought. The next moment he muttered between his teeth that she was right. He was not going to be crushed by Father Mahon. . . .

Three hours later he stood under a lamp-post in Dundrum deciphering Breslin's address from a crumpled card which he found, after long searching, in the pocket of his waistcoat. The name "Dundrum" on the post office had just reminded him of Breslin's invitation—and luckily this was Saturday night. His anger had spent itself till only a dull resentment remained—more against himself, for his boorishness at tea, than against Father Mahon for placing obstacles in the way of his marriage, or against Father Cafferley for his cynical indifference. There must be some way out of the difficulty. Thousands of mixed marriages took place every year. No matter how active was Father Mahon's hostility there must be some way of overcoming it.

A passing errand boy pointed out the way to Breslin's house. He was still seated at the table in the dining-room, when Maurice was shown in.

A book lay back upwards beside him. He held a coffee cup half-way to his lips. The only light in the room, except a glowing fire, a low shaded lamp on the table, was turned towards a picture on the wall opposite, a bunch of carnations in a cut-glass tumbler.

"Stand here, just behind me—you get it?"

"It seems all right," Maurice said indifferently.

Breslin shrugged his shoulders, murmured, "Poor Fantin," stood up, and turned on more lights. "Some supper?" he said.

Maurice said he did not want to eat.

"Take that armchair then, and we shall have some coffee by the fire—it's warmer here than in my study. Do you like this room?"

"It's different," Maurice hesitated, his eyes on Breslin's coloured jacket. "The other room is severe, this is a riot——"

"That's better—you see." He waved his arm: "this colour scheme starts from my smoking jacket. It takes one out of the damned grey of the country—the grey skies, and the hideous grey slates, and the grey lives of the people. They have grey souls if we could only see them."

"The people would have some colour in their lives if they only got the chance," Maurice said, taking a cigarette from a box which Breslin held out.

Breslin laughed ironically. "The country is dying," he said lightly. He waved a hand to the pictures on the walls. "An opiate for me—for the others," he jerked his hand towards the window, "the green and gold sentimentality of *The Star* and the Church."

"Nonsense—the country has only begun to live. Everywhere there are signs——"

"I've seen them so often—there's a monthly rose in bloom in the garden outside now, in December—pretty illusions."

"Illusions that will burst up *The Star* some day," Maurice said doggedly.

"Youth!" Breslin said dryly. "Have more coffee? You are looking at that mantelpiece—picked it up in an old house in William Street. Take my word for it, young man, the golden rule in life is to back the strongest side—one has power—it's a pretty toy—and those," he waved his hand again towards the pictures. "You've knocked your head against the Church once—a second knock might be fatal."

Maurice frowned, and threw his cigarette into the fire.

"Say it out," Breslin drawled, his lazy eyes gleaming a little. "You can damn priests and bishops as much as you like in this room. Outside—well, I'm the editor of *The Star*, and——" His eyes wandered to the table. He stretched out a hand, took up the book, and turned over a few leaves. "*Riders to the Sea*," he said, "as strong as anything in Aeschylus—and more simple. But all his plays are good. *The Playboy*——"

"Why, you damned it ten times in your paper."

"Did I?" He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I'll give you ten reasons for thinking it one of the best plays that has yet come out of Ireland."

He spoke for three or four minutes with some enthusiasm, took up the poker, tapped idly at a big lump of coal in the grate, stopped in the middle of a sentence before he had finished with his first reason, and said abruptly—

"Tell me where you got your faith?"

Maurice was taken aback. "I just believe the country will come right," he said emphatically.

"Yes, yes—but why?" Breslin said, leaning back in his chair and watching the fire.

"For a thousand reasons," Maurice said.

When he tried to put them into words, they sounded very thin in his own ears. He looked at Breslin anxiously now and again, but his eyes were fixed on the fire.

"A handful of jealous small farmers working together and sinking their differences, an old school-master with ideals, a priest with a love of his people, a few women capable of sacrifice, a growing tolerance of the religious views of others. It may not seem much to you to build a nation on," Maurice wound up, "but it makes my faith unshakable."

"A carpenter's son and a camel driver influenced millions," Breslin said musingly. "It is the faith itself that is puzzling—the weakness or strength of the evidence doesn't matter a rap. Do these people share your faith?"

"They do."

"And that brother of yours who dislikes *The Star*? A Leaguer too, you say? Is he active in politics?"

"Yes."

"Well, *The Star* can change its policy if he wins! It would be interesting to run a paper again on lines one shouldn't despise. But I hope not—I hope not. One might be tempted to believe, and faith is too harrowing," with a wry smile. He poked the fire to a blaze. "After all, Father Mahon drove you out, though you had all these people at your back," he said slyly.

"That can't happen in a few years," Maurice said hopefully. "The people want a little more courage. Many of them see clearly enough—give them a little time and they will act."

"Meanwhile I warm myself at the clerical fire," Breslin said, spreading out his hands. He changed the conversation, and talked of poetry.

Maurice listened in wonder. Poems that he vaguely liked discovered new and undreamt-of beauties on Breslin's lips. Maurice forgot the leading articles in *The Star*, the cynical view of life, in Breslin's fine rapture over Shelley—something in his eyes too, some tone in his voice was sympathetic and sincere. . . .

A reference to a folk tale led Maurice to speak of Bourneen, and of his life there. Unconsciously he drifted into a full account of his leaving, of Alice, of the difficulties about his marriage.

"Damn it," Breslin said irritably, when Maurice spoke of Father Cafferley. He laughed. "Poor old Cafferley. I wonder where he was off to at that hour—it was too early for a tea party in some publican's back parlour. That light tenor voice of his hasn't cracked yet. It keeps him in great request. If you had your clothes made by Scott he'd have given you more time, but——" he looked at Maurice's clothes. "Anyhow, he didn't think you worth his trouble. I don't know that he could do anything for you in any case. I tell you what I'd do, if I were so foolish as to be getting married and wasn't editor of *The Star*—in fact, if I were you : I'd go quietly to a registry office and let all their reverences, reverend and most reverend, go to hell."

Maurice stared at him, a troubled look in his eyes. "That never struck me," he said slowly.

Breslin was now excited. He stood up and walked to and fro, rumpling with his fingers the thick locks of hair on his forehead.

"No, you wouldn't think of it. You fellows who kick against the tyranny of the clergy make me sick. You talk and talk, and then lie down meekly under their most extravagant pretensions—you're all afraid to fight them with their own weapons." He stood still, looking at the fire. After a few seconds he gave a low chuckle. "If I hadn't to sit frock-coated every Sunday under the pulpit in the parish church I'd make 'em sit up." This seemed to amuse him so much that he laughed again.

"It's not fear," Maurice said. "Isn't it a sin?"

Breslin looked at him pityingly through half-closed lids.

"Sin," he said musingly: "that opens up a pretty discussion—but it would take half the night," he looked at an old clock on the mantelpiece, "and if you want to catch the last train we shouldn't have well begun before you leave. A sin—to break that trumpery regulation about mixed marriages! After all, the idea of sin has a certain dignity. That's degrading it. This blessed dispensation that they've been making such a fuss about with you, sending you from pillar to post like a fool—what is it? Only the pope dispenses, the theology books say. Though the fact is that every bishop—I'm told our bishop here doesn't take them, and that's to his credit—gets from Rome a lot of blank forms, like my Sunday Zoo tickets, and thenceforward is pope himself in the matter. The play begins. The victim of the wiles of a Protestant goes to his parish priest. A schoolmaster, of course, is done for from the start

With the Church's peculiar notions of scandal, the idea of a teacher marrying a Protestant is anathema. Besides, there's no inducement to fleece a dependent poor beggar like him—he can be got at in other ways. But suppose the applicant were well-to-do, and, more or less, independent of the priest? His reverence—I'm speaking generally, of course, there are notable exceptions—would pull a long face. 'It is a very difficult matter indeed. Rome is difficult of approach—it must be done through the bishop. But it's possible, of course, and I'll do my best to help.' You know the kind of thing. 'The children must be brought up Catholics. You must promise to try to convert the young lady.' You'd think religion was a brand of tooth-powder or a style in summer hats. 'And you must have some reasons,' the good man would go on. 'I'll look them up in the theology book—but you can leave them to me. I'll see that *they're* all right.' And then, at the end—remember it's the time of a man's life when he has less sense than an idiot, 'You will pay something substantial—his lordship's trouble—the upkeep of an expensive office at the Curia—the pope. But bear clearly in mind, it's only for secretarial expenses—the dispensation itself is free, gratis and for nothing.' That repetition does the trick—a couple of penny stamps and a few sheets of note-paper run up phenomenally—depends on the good father's knowledge of the bank balance of the applicant—twenty pounds, fifty, a hundred—I've known more to be paid." He rubbed his hands gleefully. "The humour of *The Star of Liberty* pales before it."

Maurice was too indignant to see humour in anything. "But when he had got rid of me as

teacher—why didn't Mahon get me the dispensation then? I'd have paid."

Breslin shrugged his shoulders and looked at Maurice quizzically. "You show a nice sense of character in those sketches of yours, but——" he gazed at the ceiling. "You're the type that sees nothing where you're involved yourself. I don't know Mahon, but I see him clearly in what you told me. No money—not anything you could give certainly—would repair his wounded self-love."

"The bishop then? He's not that kind?"

"I'll have doubts about your being able to do those sketches," Breslin said gravely. He smiled with his white, even teeth. "This blindness might wear off with the ridiculous fever that's on you—for goodness' sake get married at once. Hannigan! If I know any man I know him—the diffident, humble manner covering the pride of Lucifer. Run—you'll only just catch your train. Take my advice about the marriage. Keep it as quiet as you can—you may get known one day, and then they might make trouble—though it's as valid according to Church law as it is by the law of the land. As if it made a pin's difference in any case," he called after Maurice jeeringly from the door-step.

By sprinting he just caught the train. It jolted horribly. Acrid smoke drifted in through the open window. The weight that oppressed his mind for days had gone. The registry, of course, was absurd, he said to himself. Breslin would have his joke. No Catholic could go against the rules of his Church. . . . He walked up and down the empty compartment. How should one set about this registry marriage? He sat down and drummed his feet on the bare floor. What if there was

something in the idea after all? He laughed at the memory of Breslin's description. What would they say in Bourneen? No, he couldn't do it. Still it was a valid marriage. He could find out all about it in the free library. His fingers tingled with cold. He thrust his hands into his pockets. He pulled out a big door-key and glanced at it curiously. He had forgotten all about that. The house was waiting. Should he write to Father Mahon again? But that was hopeless. The absurd man, and he could get married in spite of him. . . . And Alice? An intense longing for her overcame him. . . . All the way home the objections to Breslin's solution became feebler and feebler . . . they recurred as he undressed in his cold room, but, always, he had an answer ready. . . .

At eleven next morning he met Alice at the tram.

"What has come over you? You look so happy," she said wonderingly.

"I am."

He hurried her into the tram. "Where are we going?" she asked.

"Oh, somewhere," he said joyfully. He inquired about her work in Tyrone, but didn't listen to a word she said. A girl opposite looked gloomy. He wondered why every one wasn't happy on such a glorious day.

"Dundrum," she said in a pleased voice, as he took tickets at Harcourt Street Station. "It's lucky I brought sandwiches."

On the mountain road, opposite the cottage, she said, "No one has taken it yet."

He handed her the key. "I have—we have taken it," he said, watching her face.

She looked from the key to him, her lips slightly parted. A deep blush slowly suffused her face and neck, a tear overflowed on her eyelid.

"Maurice!" her lips scarcely moved and her eyes dropped.

He kissed her. After a while she looked up.

"But can we?" she said, her lips trembling.

He told her about the work for Breslin, and all that had happened since. They walked towards the cottage as he spoke. He opened the door. In the kitchen she listened without a word, standing by the window overlooking the sea, her eyes fixed on Howth head.

"So there's no reason why we shouldn't get married any day," he wound up.

She sighed a little regretfully.

"You're not sorry?" he said anxiously.

"No—I'm so glad—it has a sad feeling," she said, leaning her cheek against his arm. "Not soon—not for ever so long," she said, standing away from him. Sitting on the window sill, he watched her move about from room to room.

"I'm glad you won't have to promise to convert me," she called out. Afterwards she approached him with a look of grave concern.

"Well?" he said eagerly.

"I think we'll do this room with rush matting—that greenish stuff."

Breslin was the only guest invited to the wedding. On the back of an envelope he replied, "Certainly not. The editor of *The Star of Liberty* discounts any such wicked exercise of freedom—though L. B. sends you both his best wishes." A week later he wrote again: "Those egregious people have

been tinkering with their marriage laws—some new rot beginning ‘Ne Temere.’ To-morrow I’ll have a leader, applauding it, in *The Star*. I haven’t yet grasped its full effect. You might read *The Star* for once and see what you make of the thing. In any case it’s all the more necessary to keep your little affair quiet.”

“‘Little affair,’ indeed,” Alice said, tossing her head, when she read the letter, “we must hurry off to see those pots and things. Shall I throw this in the fire?—there’s nothing in it.”

Maurice nodded.

Within a week, at eleven o’clock one morning, in a shabby registry office, dark with fog that blew in from the sea, under the spluttering flare of a gas jet, they were married.

CHAPTER XX

ALICE stood for a moment at the window watching the last of the day. She lit a lamp on the desk by her side, but she still lingered, the cord of the blind in her hand, her eyes on a silver-grey patch of sky, towards which a mass of sullen, black cloud was slowly creeping. She sighed and pulled down the blind.

"Sun gone bye-bye," a child said solemnly from the centre of the floor.

Alice turned and looked at her.

"Sun wake up again," the child said, nodding confidentially.

"There now, Alice, Maureen is teaching you sense," Maurice said cheerfully from the settle, on which he was stretched, smoking, idly watching rings float up to the ceiling. "Besides, you know it's shining brighter every day—there isn't a cloud anywhere near it."

Maureen stared at him with wide-open, big blue eyes, her little red lips pursed up.

"You little treasure," Alice said, sitting on the floor.

Maureen's eyes brightened. This was something she understood. "Mammy put dolly bye-bye. Daddy get dolly's bed," she said imperiously, pushing back the golden hair that fell thick and touzled over her forehead.

Maurice jumped up and fished out a battered doll's bed from under a table.

"Not daddy, not mammy, only Maureen done it," the child said, taking possession of the bed and pushing Maurice aside. She sat down and was soon spreading sheets and blankets with much care, then, with one pull, sweeping them, doll and all, on to the floor. This she repeated half a dozen times, saying occasionally "Maureen busy," while Alice, on a low chair by the side of the open fire-place, watched her lovingly.

"I can't help feeling afraid," she said, "and we have been so happy—nearly three years."

Maurice, half sitting on the table at her back, put out his hand and fingered her hair.

"Afraid of what?" he asked.

"Of nothing—of everything—I suppose it's foolish—but I can't help it."

He moved and stood in front of the fire.

"The convention may not choose me. Tom may have been mistaken—Breslin is certain the League man will get in. Even if I am chosen I can retire. I'd far rather be as I am," he spoke hesitatingly, with a little catch in his voice, staring at the dresser at the end of the room.

"Dolly wake up," Maureen said, shaking a grimy faced doll violently.

"That's what you ought to do with me," Alice said, stroking his hand. She stood up. "Retire, indeed! you'll do nothing of the kind," she said, taking hold of his sleeve, her eyes flashing. "After all your speaking and writing for the last three years, too."

"The wind is nothing to you for sudden changes," he said, with a relieved laugh.

"Tom would never think of sending a telegram," she said, looking at the clock. "It must be all over by now. The evening papers might have it—Breslin will be certain to know—and he's home to-night. You might run down to Dundrum after supper?"

"Me with a chance of being a Member of Parliament," Maurice said laughing boyishly. "It sounds too ridiculous."

Maureen stood, her little arms akimbo, and gave peal after peal of laughter.

"Maureen laugh too," she said, and started off again.

"There's no one more fit to be in Parliament," Alice said gravely.

"Your mother is an impartial judge," Maurice said, swinging Maureen in his arms.

"Mammy partial judge—partial judge," Maureen crowed.

"From the lips of babes and sucklings——?" Maurice said triumphantly.

"But you will run down, Maurice? I can't sleep to-night till I know," Alice said eagerly.

The old clock on the wall by the dresser wheezed six. Maureen clapped her hands.

"Maureen's bath. Only mammy bath me," she said sidling up to her mother. "Only daddy," she shouted, rushing to him.

She superintended the bringing in of the tin bath from the scullery, fussed round it as it lay on the matting in front of the fire. "Soap?" she said, with a distressed look. When this was found, she watched Maurice take the big pot of boiling water off the fire and empty it into the bath. "Hot—too hot," she said judicially, her feet wide apart, her hands clasped behind her knitted blue jersey.

When Maurice brought a bucket of cold water from the scullery she gave a sigh of satisfaction. "Nice and cold," she said: "only daddy bath Maureen."

He took her in his arms, but she slipped down again. "Coat off—apron," she said reproachfully. He took off his coat meekly, and put on a flannel apron. Maureen said approvingly "Sit in daddy's lap."

He was taking off her shoes when a knock sounded on the front door. Alice went out to the porch. Maureen said "postman," over and over again. Maurice heard a muttered conversation.

"Hurrah, hurrah!" Alice said, rushing in excitedly. "The convention has selected you."

"He's not elected yet," Breslin said dryly, following at her heels.

"Bressy, Bressy," Maureen shouted.

"By nearly two to one—your own county too. That's something for Father Mahon," she added maliciously.

Breslin gave her a sharp look and muttered into his beard.

Maureen struggled and shouted "Bressy, tick-tick."

He took his watch off its chain and handed it to her. "Maureen is a wise woman," he said. "She ignores conventions and elections and all that rot."

"Only Bressy bath me," Maureen said emphatically.

A faint blush tinged the pallid cheeks above his beard. "I never even saw a child in a bath," he said, with a helpless look at his immaculate clothes.

"The water is getting cold. It's either you or Maurice—I'm nowhere when there's a man about," Alice said.

Maureen, who was now cuddling round Breslin's neck, said with a defiant look in her little rebellious face, "Only Bressy bath me."

"She is so wise," Alice said demurely.

Breslin, following Maureen's minute instructions donned the apron, took off his coat, turned up the cuffs of his shirt and struggled with her buttons and garments. With a set face he laid her at last in the bath. Her first kick sent a huge splash over his shirt front. She crowed with delight. Afterwards, it was "Only Bressy feed Maureen," and "Only Bressy put Maureen bye-bye." She knelt in her cot, her hands over her eyes, "Gentle Jesus meek and mild," she said brokenly. She peeped through her fingers. "Bressy not kneel on toe-toes," she complained anxiously. He knelt down. She began a prayer again. "Bressy say it," she said insistently. When he came out from the bedroom he was wiping his brow with his handkerchief.

"If you've half her grit, you'll beat us," he said to Maurice.

"Beat you?" Maurice said. "Where does the contest come in? You can't go back on the convention. There won't be a Unionist candidate, so I'll have a walk over."

"Get me a looking-glass like a good fellow," Breslin said, a faint smile on his lips.

Maurice lit a candle and led the way into the second bedroom off the kitchen. He left Breslin there, and coming back to the kitchen lowered a small pot of potatoes, already simmering on the crook, nearer to the fire. In a few minutes Breslin appeared, stroking his beard, all traces of his encounter with Maureen gone. He threw himself into a rush armchair. With an ironic smile, he

watched Maurice emptying the bath and tidying up the room.

"They've been on to me already by telephone," he said, "and I've been in town. I motored here."

"Who?"

"The League people—the head office."

"It was their own convention, under their own rules. They were beaten. They may as well accept defeat gracefully," Maurice said lightly.

"I'm going to throw suspicion on the Liscannow convention in Monday's *Star*," Breslin said, lighting a cigarette. He rolled the smoke luxuriously in his mouth, emitted a series of perfect rings, and watched them expand with one eye shut.

"Why, only this morning you patted it on the back. What's this you called it?—in the choicest *Star* language—'a parliament of free and independent citizens, with the authority of a united people behind it,' and the usual trimmings 'faith—fatherland—patriotism—toleration.'"

"On Monday it will be suspect. About the middle of the week we shall probably say that it was rigged by a malignant anti-national faction," Breslin said, blowing more rings.

"You're colossal," Maurice said in mock admiration.

"Hush," Breslin said, holding up his hand.

From Maureen's bedroom came the low crooning of Alice's voice, with, now and again, the child's treble, muffled, as if taking the note half asleep.

"It has a charm," Breslin said gently, after a few minutes.

Maurice poured some water in to a saucepan of eggs and placed it by the fire.

"The truth is," Breslin said, "our organizer

down there has been asleep. We're going to slough him. He was so confident of a walk-over that he didn't take the usual means——"

"So it really was a free convention," Maurice said, interested.

"Always, when we lose, the convention was rigged by the other side," Breslin said, with a shrug.

"You give credit to us—I suppose you call us the other side—for your own virtues: that is too generous," Maurice said ironically.

"I won't bandy terms."

He listened again. The crooning still continued, but in a lower tone. The child's voice came fainter, and only at long intervals.

"Shut that door—it's a little ajar," he whispered. "I don't want Mrs. Blake to hear us."

Maurice crossed the room on tiptoe and shut the door. When he returned to the fire-place, he looked inquiringly at Breslin.

"This is going to be a fight without gloves," Breslin said seriously. "Our people are frightened. They'll stop at nothing. They've organizations enough, but the people are slipping away. They're weak in the towns——"

"They've got the publicans and slum-owners, and—the priests, in so far it suits the interest of the Church," Maurice interrupted dryly.

Breslin waved this aside. "The country people are not as solid as they used to be. Then there are all you foolish people who make a hash of thinking for yourselves," he pursed his lips contemptuously.

"*The Star* talks enough of liberty and toleration. I've often told you, Louis, that some day the people would attach some real meaning to those words. You talk of liberty and tolerance and hound down

every one who refuses to bend under your narrow, bigoted tyranny."

"That's very crude," Breslin said, lighting another cigarette. "Not good enough even for a leading article in *The Star*. But we're wandering from the point. I advise you to withdraw your name," he said earnestly. "Don't stand for the Liscannow division."

Maurice stared at him, then laughed. "Why, I'm as good as in," he said confidently.

"The League will declare the convention invalid, and start a candidate of its own."

"They'll only show their weakness," Maurice said laughing.

"Our people never liked you. You weren't a thick-and-thin party man. They hate those articles of yours in *The Dawn*. They don't want people to think—only to vote straight. They're furious with you for beating the official candidate. Yet they'd probably let you in unopposed only——" he stroked his beard, and hesitated. "The Church will be against you," he continued with a grimace: "a dismissed teacher; out of forty priests at the convention only six supported you. We've all the details already, you see."

"I won, nevertheless," Maurice said firmly.

"You don't see any other complications?" Breslin said gently.

"I suppose there'll be the usual rough and tumble of an election. I don't mind a straight fight——"

"But it won't be a straight fight." Breslin pulled an orange slip out of his pocket. "They got it at the League office five minutes after the result of the convention—a telegram from Father

Mahon. 'Search registry offices of Dublin for record of marriage of Maurice Blake and Alice Barton about three years ago.'"

Maurice walked up and down in front of the fire-place with a set face and clenched hands.

"Will you use that weapon?" he said bitterly.

"I—oh!—damn it, there's some limit," Breslin said sharply. "No—I won't use it. *The Star* won't either—I told them at the League office it wouldn't be wise to mix our man up with it in the Press," he added dryly, "in view of the action this fellow Mahon is likely to take. It told with them—danger of a charge of undue influence, etc. They scented the truth at once—I didn't tell them. They don't half like the whole thing in a way—plays into the hands of the enemy. But you must be beaten by fair means or foul. The organization couldn't stand a defeat. They're chuckling for all they're worth; but they'll let Mahon and his friends do the dirty work. Oh yes, the weapon will be used, and used with a vengeance. Don't face it, Maurice. I don't mind for yourself—but your wife, and the child."

Maurice stood opposite the fire, his eyes on the pot which had now begun to boil. He lifted, with the poker, the lid, which was being forced up and down by the steam.

"It had to come some time," he said musingly. "Do you know, I've hardly thought of that *Ne Temere* decree since a few days before I was married—you wrote to me, you remember?—never as affecting myself. Alice and Maureen did you say? Maureen will hardly mind. And Alice—I'd like to keep her out of it. It'll be pretty bad, I suppose?" he smiled drearily.

"Mud, garbage, filth," Breslin said emphatically.

Maurice leant his forehead against the beam across the fireplace.

"And this is religion," he said in a dull, wondering tone.

"The holier the name the better for leading the hosts of hell to battle," Breslin said grimly. He shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "If one only sees it the right way it's as humorous as *The Star of Liberty*. Though I doubt if the poor devils we trample on have much sense of humour left in them," he added, looking at Maurice through half-closed lids. "Have sense, Maurice," he went on airily, waving his cigarette. "You make a fetish of names—liberty, toleration, religion, principle—what are they? A mirage. Good names enough on a banner to rouse the mob, but——"

He pitched his cigarette into the fire, and flicked carefully some ash off his trousers.

"I'll go down to Liscannow on Monday," Maurice said coldly.

"And Mrs. Blake? You'll subject her to all this?"

Maurice smiled slowly. "Oh, she believes in those old names too," he said, lifting the pot from the fire. He took it to the scullery, poured out the water, covered the potatoes with a cloth, and stood the pot beside the fire.

"They're done to a turn. You'll stay to supper, Louis?" he said heartily. "The eggs are new laid."

"That's more than they'll be at Liscannow," Breslin said dryly. "You're mad of course—the gods are sometimes merciful to those they are about to destroy. If it weren't for your wife, I'd

rather enjoy it." He stared at the fire, and his eyes gleamed a little. "It's a chance of finding out the power of these fellows—the sodality, the pulpit, the confessional, and all that—in an election."

"Your friends!" Maurice said mockingly.

"They're of use—for the moment. They play their own game though. Take that damn *Ne Temere*. They drop it on us just at the moment when we're straining our lungs shouting 'toleration.' They knife us with one hand and double their subscriptions to our funds with the other. Even I'm in doubt sometimes whether they're using us or we're using them."

Maurice drew a table in front of the fire. "You're a great help to a man, Louis," he said gravely. "Whenever I'm inclined to waver you set me right. There must be a lot of good in the people since you fellows haven't killed it long ago. 'Twill win out, yet. I——"

Alice opened the bedroom door and shut it behind her quietly.

"She's sound asleep for the night. You can talk away—there's no fear of disturbing her," she said, taking a cloth from a drawer of the dresser and laying it on the table. They both watched her silently.

"Eggs, potatoes, butter, a cold apple tart," she said, as they sat down to supper, "and I'll make you some coffee afterwards."

"Excellent," Breslin said somewhat too fervently, checking a rueful pursing of his lips. "It's so peaceful and quiet up here," breaking the top off an egg—"ideal. I dream some day of giving up politics and finding some such retreat as this. That husband of yours, Mrs. Blake, doesn't know when he's

happy." Alice looked round the cosy living-room wistfully. "And of all the purposeless worries of life," he continued, "Parliament is the worst—a man can do nothing there."

"Maurice can," she said eagerly, her eyes brightening. "He'll have a chance of doing the things he has been saying for years. Now that he'll be inside the party—but I'll spare his feelings," looking at Maurice affectionately. "You can't suppress his speeches in future in *The Star*," she added, turning to Breslin with a smile.

"There's nothing we're not capable of doing in *The Star*," he said calmly.

"Some day I know you'll see the truth," she said simply. "Maureen trusts you. You——" She stopped abruptly and blushed.

"It shows how weak is the evidence of faith," he drawled. "Tell her, Maurice," and he busied himself with his egg.

She listened in silence while Maurice spoke, for the most part with her eyes bent on her plate. Once she looked at the door of Maureen's bedroom for a moment, and once at Maurice's face, as if interested in his appearance rather than in what he was saying.

"But we are married," she said in a faltering voice, when he finished. She looked helplessly at Maurice.

"For ever," he said quietly.

"Not only in the eyes of the law, but before God?"

"Father Mahon will say you are not; people will believe him and say things it will hurt you to hear," Breslin said gently.

She did not take her eyes off Maurice's face.

"Before God? Maurice," she repeated solemnly, "you believe it?"

"As firmly as that I live."

Her eyes flashed. She turned to Breslin. "It doesn't matter to us what these people say—now," she said proudly.

CHAPTER XXI

FOR some miles, as the train wound sinuously through the valley, Maurice had been dreamily recognizing familiar objects—Slieve Mor, at different angles; Greenawn Abbey, which he had once visited with Driscoll.

"It seems only yesterday," he said. "But three years is a long time—I wonder what it will all be like."

"Mountain," Maureen said gleefully, standing on the seat, her face pressed against the glass of the window.

"I dare say it will be a hard pull," Maurice said, with a short laugh.

"Your work in *The Dawn* will tell," Alice said cheerfully. "Remember what Tom said in his letter—how enthusiastic those men at the convention were about it. You've worked hard for a great ideal and now you'll see the fruit—not a Catholic Ireland nor a Protestant Ireland, but an Ireland to which all men, no matter what their creed, can give their best service without fear of being victimized in the name of religion."

"It sounds like a copybook maxim," Maurice said with a shrug.

"It appealed to the convention—you'll see they'll act on it too. The country is sick of——"

A great cheer interrupted her, and the opening

bars of "See the Conquering Hero comes," on a strident brass band.

"What's up?" Maurice said, peering through the gathering dusk. "That's the Liscannow goods store. We'll be in in a minute."

"It's you, of course," Alice said excitedly: then, more sedately, and a little complacently, "It's very different from your going away."

As the train moved slowly along the platform the crowd cheered. Flares were lit and waved wildly. The band played louder and louder, determined to be heard above the din.

"There he is." "That's him I tell you, with the woman and the child." "The new member for ever," passed from mouth to mouth.

The door was wrenched open. Tom, red in the face and laughing shrilly, gripped Maurice's hand and said—

"It's not bad for a start. The hint of opposition in *The Star* this morning put great heart into the people. Keep back there, will ye?" to the crowd. "Would ye be frightening the child?"

The band stopped. Maureen clapped on the window. "More show—more show—more music," she said eagerly, watching the swaying of the flares.

"Bedad, she'll be making a speech next—my own boy, and he older, hasn't the courage of a rabbit in him," Tom said in astonishment.

The band began to play again, but it was beaten down with cries of "The addresses." "Speech—speech." Dozens of hands were stretched into the compartment and seized Maurice's hand or arm or coat-tail, or Alice's hands indifferently. There were shouts of welcome, and cheers for *The Dawn* and Maurice Blake.

"Clear the way there for Dr. Fitzpatrick that's reading the address on the part of the town," some one called out.

"For town and country you might say," another said.

"Aye, aye."

A stout, florid-faced, clean-shaven man, with a severe mouth and twinkling blue eyes, elbowed his way to the front. He stood on the footboard and waved a sheet of blue foolscap at the crowd.

"The train can't be kept here all night," he said good-humouredly, when he had secured something approaching silence, "and there's a lady and a child tired out after a long journey. I'll just present this address—I've half a dozen more in my pocket. Mr. Blake can read them at his leisure, and we'll have his speech at the Mechanics' Institute. Run off now and form the procession. Ireland and Liscannow, and Mr. Blake for ever."

The crowd cheered and made for the gates. Maureen gazed wistfully after the vanishing torches and sighed. Dr. Fitzpatrick shook hands heartily with Alice and Maurice, saying a little condescendingly—

"You're a great man now, Mr. Blake. I'm sure we're all very glad—very glad indeed."

A small group of Bourneen people greeted Maurice timidly when he stepped out of the train.

"Why, mother!" he said kissing her.

"Oh, Maurice agra, and sure we didn't like to intrude," she said, half-frightened.

"Your father'd be here as well as the rest only he's stiff at home with the rheumatics. There isn't a bit a jealousy of you in the whole townland, nor in the parish as far as I can hear. It's great entirely,

glory be to God, and 'tis I'm beholden to all the people, neighbours and strangers alike, and the torches and the band, not to mention Dr. Fitzpatrick himself."

"Come, come, Mr. Blake," Dr. Fitzpatrick interrupted sharply. "The carriage is waiting—oh, is that you, Mrs. Blake? Your mother, of course. Oh, yes. How is Mike's rheumatism?"

"Finely, thank you, doctor—thanks be to God and you," Mrs. Blake said.

But Dr. Fitzpatrick had rushed off, and was trying to detach Alice and Maureen from Mrs. Tom, Mrs. Crawford, and Mrs. Jim Reardon.

"There'll be time enough for all this," he said fussily. "You really must come, Mrs. Blake—the people'll be getting impatient."

"Stop, Maurice, stop, Alice, stop, doctor agra," Mrs. Blake shouted after them excitedly, when, at last, they were on their way to the gate. "If we weren't forgetting old Master Driscoll, and he within in the waiting-room, and he that failing that Mrs. Hinnissey had to stay and mind him."

"Really, Mr. Blake, I must insist," Dr. Fitzpatrick said. He stamped his foot angrily as Maurice, with Maureen in his arms, and Alice disappeared into the waiting-room.

Driscoll held out a bandaged hand to Maurice, and looked pathetically at Alice.

"They've grand rooms taken for ye at Leary's Hotel, I'm told, and both sides of your own people have a place ready for ye—but—but——"

"Couldn't you put us up, Mr. Driscoll?" Alice said with a smile.

"There, now, what did I tell you, master?" Mrs. Hinnissey said triumphantly.

"Maurice—Mr. Blake I ought to say, only I'm forgetting my good manners—and you too, ma'am, and the child, 'tis ye all are heartily welcome. Didn't he send in this morning," she whispered with a nod at Driscoll, "to Mac's shop for a beddeen, fitted out with the best of everything, for the child to sleep in. Sure 'tis his heart'd be broken entirely if ye went anywhere else."

Driscoll laid his hand on Maureen, who was staring at him solemnly.

"I brought a covered car to keep the wind off the child," he said brokenly.

"Now, Mrs. Blake—really," Dr. Fitzpatrick said from the door.

"Maurice must go alone—I'm going straight home with Mr. Driscoll," she said decisively.

Fitzpatrick frowned and expostulated, but she was firm. "Women have no sense of public duty—or of effect," he muttered, leading Maurice to a waiting carriage. "A child, too, always looks well in a procession and arouses sympathy. That old man has a bad heart—he ought to be in bed."

"All the more reason why my wife should see him home—besides, the child is tired," Maurice said.

"Capital!" Fitzpatrick said, rubbing his hands. "Excellent for the reporters. I'll make a point of it in explaining Mrs. Blake's absence. A mother's anxiety—excellent."

They had some difficulty in getting into the dilapidated landau. The band had struck up again and the horses were restive.

"Hold on to them like blue blazes—if they get their heads they'll make smithereens of Thade Carty and the big drum," the diminutive coachman, in a battered silk hat and an old livery coat, several

sizes too large for him, cried out to the small mob clinging desperately to the shafts and reins. "Let ye spring in doctor and be starting the band and the nags'll follow quiet enough."

An irregular troop of torch-bearers led the procession. The band followed. Then came the candidate's carriage, and more torch-bearers behind. A yelling crowd filled the roadway on both sides. Maurice's head was in a whirl. He seemed to think of a dozen things at once: how ridiculous it was to be seated in this grand carriage (it creaked and swayed and lurched like a ship in a rough sea); of Driscoll and Alice and the child; of the friendly Fitzpatrick whom he had known for years, but who, hitherto, had ignored him outside the brief moments of professional visits. Here and there in the crowd he recognized a face, Hinnissey, Jim Reardon, Tom. Their friendly grins, though distorted by the curious lights and shadows of the torches, gave him a feeling of relief. Had he only dreamt of that telegram and of the cryptic leader in to-day's *Star*? He had feared distrust and suspicion, and here, on every side, were friendly and enthusiastic faces.

"There is no other candidate?" he said.

"That's what I can't make out," Fitzpatrick said in a cautious whisper. "There's all sorts of hugger-mugger going on. As a rule, I'm on the end of every wire, but I must admit I'm a bit at sea in this. At twelve o'clock mass yesterday a general mission through the diocese was announced, to begin the Sunday following the day we expect you to be nominated. 'Twas the first any one heard of it. I'd make nothing of it, only Galey, the post-master, said to me coming out, with a nod and a

wink, 'Look out for squalls, doctor—your man isn't in yet.' I tried to get more out of him—there's nothing he doesn't know with his nose in every telegram,—but he wouldn't blab another word. He's on the other side, more's the pity, or he'd be sure to be more friendly. You haven't any inkling yourself?"

A loud burst of cheering opposite an illuminated house diverted the doctor's attention.

"There again," he said, "see! I'm the only house illuminated in that row. Not a candle in Duggan's windows, the chairman of the urban council, you probably know? He was against you at the convention, but the big vote on your side brought him round. He promised me last night he'd light up, and be on the platform to meet you. And there's his house as dark as hell, and he hasn't been at the station." He stared at the back of the driver with a frown.

Fitzpatrick's spirits revived as the procession passed through the main street. About one house in three was illuminated with one or two rows of guttering candles to each window.

"It's not bad—not bad," he said. "You're only middling strong in the best streets—you're not sound on the drink question, you see. I looked up your writings in *The Dawn* to try and find something that'd appeal to a publican. Between you and me, it's well for you that they only read *The Star*, or they'd be even stronger against you."

A crowd in front of an unlighted house booed lustily. Discordant brass instruments brayed through the open windows.

"Timmins for ever. Down with Blake," rose in a concerted shout above the din.

"What the devil do they mean by that?" Fitzpatrick asked excitedly.

A rotten egg broke on his hat. A paper bag of flour, catching the driver's hat on the way, enveloped Maurice in white. The torches in front wavered. The band stopped playing. Instruments were gripped like clubs. Fitzpatrick stood up and shouted in a stentorian voice, "Don't break order, boys—play up the band—take no notice of the loafers—quick march." These orders were echoed by other excited voices. After a few minutes' indecision, during which volleys of flour and eggs came from the darkened building, the procession moved on to the strains of "God save Ireland" and the jeers and boos of the crowd on the side-walk.

Fitzpatrick wiped his hat gingerly with a handkerchief, saying, "The Erinities—that's their hall—aren't going to take their physic lying down then. Damn that egg—'twas a year old if 'twas a day—and the hand that fired it. So they have poor old Timmins still in their eye. I don't deny he's a great orator—but he has to be primed up for it. He's not worth a damn sober, and a week's speechifying always lands him in the horrors. It's odd how it takes him—an army of flies attacking his face, and pigs eating him from the boots up—always the same way—very interesting to medical science."

Maurice was depressed and disgusted. How many of his supporters were like Fitzpatrick? He had pictured them so differently. He recognized a boat-builder whom he used to know. He held out his hand and Tracy shook it silently. His cordial grip, and the look of quiet enthusiasm in his clean-cut face made Maurice feel better. He began

to scan the crowd closely. His spirits rose. Here and there was a face with an ideal and capable of fighting for it.

When the carriage stopped at the Mechanics' Hall the crowd shouted itself hoarse. Ten or twelve men accompanied Maurice to the first floor room from which he was to speak. He knew Dr. Grace, Tracy, the captain of the county football team—a clean-shaven, tongue-tied blacksmith, with a strong jaw, whose name he forgot, a young solicitor named Duffy, and Healy, the big draper. They had all been active in the Gaelic League or in the athletic association. He was a little surprised to see Foster and Taylor, two Protestant shopkeepers. He knew they were in sympathy with the language movement, but he had always understood that they were Unionist in politics. Taylor laughed as they shook hands.

"You're wondering what I'm doing in this galley," he said: and added gravely, "If your views in *The Dawn* are to be Nationalist politics, I'm a Nationalist—and so are most of the Unionists here."

"Come now, Blake, the people are getting impatient," Fitzpatrick said fussily.

"Let them have it straight from the shoulder," Tom whispered.

"Home Rule and black porter," a bibulous voice shouted from the crowd as Maurice opened his lips.

"No," he said, holding up a hand for silence; "but Home Rule and hard work. We shout for freedom, for the right to manage our own affairs, for a Parliament. What are we prepared to do with this power when we get it?"

"Get back our own," the same voice answered.

"It's a tired man *you'd* be then, trudging round the pubs after your money," a voice said jeeringly.

"Not so far neither," another said. "Hasn't he it all banked in his nose?"

"What'd we do with it but drive the Protestants after the landlords," another voice said.

"Shut up you naygur of an Erinite."

"Don't be wasting a decent name on the old Molly."

Maurice tried to get on. He developed the idea of power begetting responsibility and even sacrifice.

"No soft jobs for Erinites. They think they've their hand in the Home Rule till already," some one interrupted.

He wound up with an appeal for toleration. Ireland needed every son she had. The very name Home Rule created an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion. He was afraid there was some cause for this. It was for the Catholic majority to prove by their actions that their hands were clean. Here in this constituency let them show that they respected the religious opinions of all men and persecuted none.

There was loud cheering when he retired from the window.

"Live and let live is my motto," a fishwife shouted. "The poor Protestants! sure they'll be up agin hell in the next world, why not let them have a bite and a sup in peace in this vale of woe?"

In the room Fitzpatrick buttonholed Healy. "What do you think of him, Frank? So—so, eh?"

"I'm surprised at you, doctor, going agin the

clergy. And you after curing poor old Timmins out of the D. T.'s so often too. Do you mean to say you're getting in earnest over politics at the end of your life?"

"End, indeed—I'm good for thirty years yet. I've paid Timmins back, anyway, for his vote against my nephew in that asylum appointment. I'm not a man to be trifled with. Between ourselves though, I was a bit sold that so many priests went for Timmins at the convention—and not one of them turning up to-night. What do you make of it, Frank?"

"Begad, you might be caught out at last, doctor. I met Duggan as I was coming in, and he told me the supporters of Blake'd be in a queer kettle of fish before the week was out."

"And why, Frank, why?" Fitzpatrick asked eagerly.

"I asked him that, and he only blinked his old fish eyes; so I told him go and smother himself," Healy said indifferently.

Fitzpatrick rubbed his chin anxiously, nodded to Healy and crossed to the fireplace, where Maurice was speaking to Duffy and Dr. Grace.

"I've only just remembered an urgent case—very sorry, Blake, that I've to be off. I hoped to have you up at the house for a bite or a nip of something—may see you later. Count me in with any arrangements you may make."

"I'll attend the call for you, Fitz; there's a committee meeting and you're chairman," Grace said slyly.

"Im—possible, my dear boy, im—possible." With a wave of his hand he hurried out of the room.

"Fitz always makes a professional exit," Duffy said dryly. "What is it to-night? Cards?"

Grace shook his head. "There's more than cards on his mind—he has been uneasy all the evening."

"Oh, nothing weighs on Fitzzy long," Duffy said. "How in the world did he drift to our side? He usually keeps his eye on the palace, and that hasn't smiled on us yet."

"The committee meeting, gentlemen," Tracy said, "we can hold it here."

Some one drew attention to the fact that Maurice had had no food. An adjournment to Leary's Hotel was proposed, but was objected to by a sharp-nosed, spectacled little man with a pointed beard, who said that he was not on speaking terms with Leary, and wouldn't be seen inside his door. He would, however, be proud to run out himself and bring in some food for a brilliant fellow journalist.

"McCreery of the *Liscannow Advertiser*," he added with a quick bob, shaking Maurice's hand vehemently.

It was finally settled that the meeting should be held in Dr. Grace's rooms, where Maurice could get tea and ham. On the way, Maurice walked with Tom. A few forlorn candles, burnt almost to the stumps, still flickered in a window here and there.

"How does it feel?" Tom asked anxiously.

"Rotten."

"You don't tell me now."

"Father James has got hold of the marriage."

Tom's face set firmly, and he walked a few paces in silence.

"That's hell," he said, walking heavily, his head well forward. After a few minutes he added, "Best tell the lads."

"I'm going to—at Dr. Grace's."

In less than half an hour afterwards he told them. Dr. Grace's little sitting-room over Miss Farrell's confectionery was overcrowded. Healy was still at tea at the small round table. Duffy, his legs dangling from the sofa-end, fondled a glass of whiskey and water. Tom's figure in front of the firelight made a grotesque shadow, huge and terrible, on the ceiling. The football captain, erect, awkward, shy, stood like a sentinel beside the closed door. Maurice stood at the corner of the mantelpiece, watching gas hissing from the coal.

"In the absence of Dr. Fitz I move that Dr. Grace takes the chair," Tracy said.

"Hear hear," came from all parts of the room.

"I'm in it," Grace said from his seat on the edge of a writing-desk. "The minutes of the last meeting, Mr. Tracy, please."

Tracy fumbled with a penny exercise-book.

"There's something I've got to say first," Maurice said quietly. "All this has been so sudden—let me thank you for your confidence in me——"

"You're deserving of it." "Hear, hear."

"That there was no opportunity of letting you know it before this. In fact, it did not occur to me as likely to have any bearing on the election till I got some information on Saturday night."

There was now dead silence. The football captain relaxed his features, his head bent forward. Healy held a knife, on which was impaled a pat of butter, suspended over a slice of bread, his eyes fixed on Maurice.

"There is to be a contest——"

"I guessed as much," Healy said, relieved, spreading the butter on the bread.

"A matter in connection with my private life, known, I thought, only to one or two down here—to my brother and Mr. Driscoll of Bourneen, in fact——"

"I never told it even to my wife," Tom said emphatically.

"Tom is as close as the grave in regard to anything private," the football captain said sepulchrally.

Maurice smiled faintly. The audience now craned attentive necks.

"Has come to the knowledge of our opponents, and I've reason to believe the priests are forcing a contest. I dare say it is more or less public at this moment."

"Fitzy must have got wind of it," Duffy said, holding up his glass to the light. "Come to the point, man," he murmured.

"It's in regard to my marriage," Maurice said, facing his hearers squarely. "I married a Protestant in a registry office. The law of the land says I'm married. The Church says I am not."

"That you're living with your wife without being married to her," Healy said horrified, letting his knife drop with a clatter on his plate.

The noise broke the tension. Maurice shrugged his shoulders.

"Let any one say that outside, and we'll slap a writ at him," Duffy said standing up.

"Much good that'd do you, with maybe a couple of fellows or more on the jury," Healy said, "that won't agree to a verdict agin their Church till the crack of doom. Besides, I wouldn't be liking myself to put the law of the land above the law of the Church. Now, Mr. Blake, be sensible in the matter. I don't mind having a whack at the clergy

for their interfering ways—God knows it's hard to stand them, and I was glad enough to support you for the independent, respectful way you always stood up agin them in *The Dawn*, but this is another pair of shoes entirely. The sanctity of the marriage bond is a ticklish thing—sure we all know there isn't luck nor grace when the priest's hand isn't held over you. Have you any child now?"

"Yes," Maurice said dryly.

"That's surprising enough! Listen to me now," he said expansively. "All these things can be set right. I'll speak to his lordship myself—he's under one or two little obligations to me. A quiet marriage now—I've known the like of it often done—up in the cathedral, in the dead of night or before the dawn of day, and nobody the wiser——"

"If that insult is put on a decent woman, damme, if I won't vote for Timmins," the football captain said explosively.

Maurice looked at him gratefully.

"Now, Mr. Flaherty, now, you and your hot-heads of football players. Let ye all listen to reason. I know what I'm saying. And my wife head of the women's confraternity too—she'd scrape the eyes out of me, she's that holy, if she saw me supporting a man that wasn't married," Healy said, sweat oozing out of his forehead.

Maurice clenched his fists in an effort to control himself.

"He's married as tightly as you are, my good man," Duffy said dryly.

"The minutes, Mr. Tracy? This is a private matter of Mr. Blake's. Too much has already been said on it," Dr. Grace said loudly.

"You won't ask him for a guarantee to set things right?" Healy said aggressively.

"Certainly not," Grace said. "The minutes, Mr. Tracy?"

"Then I rise out of ye, and wash my hands of it," Healy said, walking out of the room.

"Any others who take that view—and might like to follow?" Grace said.

Two men, whom Maurice did not know, whispered together in a corner, took their hats sheepishly off a bookcase and followed Healy. One said from the door—

"Believe you me, doctor, it can't be done—and myself, and Willy that's gone out there, having little girls nuns in the convent too. It's past reason."

Duffy put away his untasted glass. He looked round the room, scanning each face.

"There's only Fitzzy left," he said, as if to himself. "Why in the world did you make him chairman?" he asked pettishly.

"He just took it. Fitzzy has a way with him," Grace said ruefully.

"He has a way of turning tail, too, when things get hot. Please God we'll see no more of him," Duffy said hopefully. "I'll act as your agent, if you'll have me?" he said, turning to Maurice and holding out his hand. "I'm sorry for you, Blake, and for your wife, that this thing has to be fought out over you. It's an awkward fix, but I'm almost glad it has arisen. There are these people up in the North saying that we Catholics'll ride rough-shod over them in spite of the law. It's for us now to show them they're wrong. This minute you have a majority of voters in this division in favour of you. There's very little security for any man, Protestant

or Catholic, in this country if the priests and Timmins can secure your defeat on the head of your marriage."

"Hear, hear," Flaherty said loudly.

"We've got to show," Duffy went on, facing his audience, "that the law of the land can't be overridden by a Roman decree about which we were never consulted. This blessed decree *Ne Temere*—the infernal cheek of it—says that Mrs. Blake is a—— I beg your pardon, Blake, I forgot you," he said hesitating; "not that there's much use in sparing your feelings now, for worse and grosser things'll be said."

"I'm quite prepared for them—so is my wife," Maurice said firmly, though his lips twitched a little.

"I take it that what we have heard makes no change in our relation to Mr. Blake—that he is our candidate," Dr. Grace said.

"Blake for ever," Flaherty said, the others clapping their hands.

"Then the minutes, Mr. Tracy," Dr. Grace said with a sigh of relief.

But the minutes were never read.

It was Grace himself who started a desultory talk with, "I wonder what they'll do?"

"Use the mission, of course—the holy fathers will preach *Ne Temere* from the pulpits and tap every house direct through the confessional," Duffy said angrily.

They sat late making plans for the campaign. It was after twelve when Maurice drove out to Bourneen. Driscoll and the child were asleep. Alice was sewing by the kitchen fire.

"Well?" she said.

"Our people know what they have to face," he said cheerfully.

"And they're going on?"

"They're fine fellows—win or lose it will be a victory." A shadow crossed her face. "You're not losing heart?" he asked.

"No," she said in a low tone, gazing sadly in the fire; "only sorry that so much wrong is done in the name of God. You won't let it harden your heart, Maurice? . . ."

CHAPTER XXII

DRISCOLL'S appearance, as he hobbled out to breakfast next morning, shocked Maurice. Huge knots disfigured his fingers. His face was livid. His white locks had become straggling yellow wisps. Only the old gentle eyes remained. Yet these too had changed. They had more fire in them, and determination, when he spoke of anything in which he was interested.

"I'm going down the hill quick," he said with a smile, "ever since I left you in the summer, but I'll not give in till they carry me out feet foremost."

In the garden, afterwards, as he was about to set out for Liscannow, with some sinking of heart Maurice told Driscoll of Father Mahon's telegram, expecting the usual counsel of submission. The old man struck his stick firmly on the path.

"If your heart tells you you're right," he said feebly, "never mind the risk. These last few months, and I not able to read or to work, my thoughts were wandering a lot over my whole life. What I was most sorry for was the times I was cautious and prudent; and the only consolation I had was that I helped in the rearing of people more courageous than myself. Never count the cost when you think you're right. That's the only way the world'll get out of the bog it's in."

He stood by the gate watching the children pass by to school, a few sods of turf under an arm of each.

"It's well they get some heat for their bodies itself, for it's little they get for their minds since you left," he said sadly.

They walked slowly towards the school. The gate hung on one hinge. Grass and weeds covered the flower beds. The plaster had fallen from the walls in great irregular patches. The creeper lay sodden on the ground. The paint on the front door had worn away to the priming. Broken panes were patched with cardboard. One window was boarded half-way up.

"The sash fell out near a year ago," Driscoll said angrily.

"Shall we go in?" Maurice said.

"'Twould break your heart—and the poor man within'd be frightened to death too. Long ago he got orders from Father James to keep me out. Poor fellow, he's one of them that some people say is his own worst enemy. But the parish is suffering. The Board in Dublin made many an attempt to get rid of him, but Father James wouldn't budge. The people are grumbling—what can they do?"

"We shall make an effort to change all this."

"Do then. It's time something was done. I'll walk with you as far as the chapel—you can leave me there."

During his walk to Liscannow, Maurice couldn't get rid of the memory of the dilapidated school-house—almost in the shadow, too, of the glaring limestone spire that now crowned the chapel tower. Neighbours spoke to him, and congratulated him,

but he hurried on. The Father Mahons had seized on the education of the country and were throttling it—they gave the people limestone spires instead. He laughed bitterly. What were they aiming at? Durrisk gateway reminded him of the convents and monasteries round Dublin. Soon, perhaps, Durrisk would be a monastery. The whole country would be one big convent of priests and nuns. This, of course, was ridiculous—still. They were amassing immense wealth. They held the people in spiritual fear. . . .

He asked himself gravely if he had any religion left—if he ever had any. His thoughts went back to his childhood. There were moments . . . and priests had helped him too, old Father Boland, and later, Father Malone. Yes, in spite of Father Mahon he held to his earlier vision. Men had suffered for their faith and for their priests. . . . For the Father Mahons? The country couldn't be so foolish. . . . What did an awakening so often lead to? Breslin's scepticism. And the scepticism of the ignorant would be worse still. He stood on the bridge and watched the river swirl rapidly under the arches. The Mahons were damming it with their little spades. There were so many of them! Would they succeed?

Liscannow had resumed its listless mood. Less than a dozen people passed him between the bridge and the main street. In front of Leary's hotel a pack of hounds yapped loudly, impatient of restraining whips. He bought a *Star* which had just arrived, but there was no reference to the election. Liscannow seemed to ignore it too. He called at Duffy's office.

"There's nothing to do till the other side

moves. They're active—Timmins was with the bishop this morning for over an hour—but they've said nothing yet, we'll just sit tight," was the agent's advice.

Days passed. Maurice heard minute details of Bourneen news: Father Malone had been sent to a mountainy parish; the new curate was always galivanting into Liscannow, and had a piano, yellow kid gloves and a gold-handled umbrella; the cess for the new spire was something cruel.

There were visits to the Crawfords, the Blakes, the Reardons, the Hinnisseys; and return visits. Miss Clancy, who was just home from a Dublin convent school, called very formally on Alice, dropping a card on the kitchen dresser. She complained of the lack of society in Bourneen, and left, hurriedly and blushing, when Mrs. Hinnissey came in and addressed her as Janie. Deputations came to impress on Maurice the crying need of a grant of Government money—to be had for the asking once he was in Parliament—for draining the bog, making a railway through the mountains, lengthening the Strand boat-slip.

Every day he paid a visit to Liscannow, but nothing happened. *The Star* was silent. Breslin wrote that Timmins was to be supported by the League, and Maurice repudiated. The delay was due to the difficulty of finding some decent reason for upsetting the decision of the convention. But this, he thought, in experienced hands, would not be of long duration. *The Star* would make no reference to the marriage throughout the campaign: the local League rag—he believed it was called *The Liscannow News*—would do all that was necessary, but guardedly. "I'll see that *The Star* lets you

down lightly," he wound up. "Factionist, enemy of the people, betrayer of your country, Socialist, anti-clerical is the worst I'll let any one write in the way of names.' And a P.S.: "I hope that it won't be too beastly—but it will.—L.B."

Every day Maurice expected the blow, but it didn't come. The Sheriff fixed the day of nomination, a Saturday. Maurice was still the only candidate in the field. Next day the dead walls of Liscannow, and the gates of all the Catholic churches in the constituency, were placarded with notices of a general mission in every parish of the diocese, to begin at six o'clock in the evening of the Sunday following the nomination. Maurice and his helpers became more active. No public meetings were held, but there was much interviewing of leading supporters in all parts of the division. He went about with a smiling face, but his nerves were on the rack. He always returned to Bourneen with a fear that something—vague but terrifying—had happened to Alice during his absence. But always he found her happy with some new wonder of Maureen's doings and sayings on her lips.

Sometimes she said, "You're not minding, Maurice?"

And he said, "Nor you?"

Then they sat silent for awhile before the fire, and both seemed to sigh at the same moment.

On the Thursday before the nomination *The Star of Liberty* announced in leaded type that the Liscannow convention was found to be informal. The political organization committee in Dublin, in view of the fact that there was now no time to hold a properly constituted convention, had nominated Mr. Edward Timmins for the vacant seat. This

was the natural choice, as Mr. Timmins seemed to have secured the majority of the legally accredited votes at the informal convention. A moderate leading article supported the decision of the committee. Mr. Timmins was an old and tried worker for the cause, whose opinions on all national questions were sound. The same could not be said of Mr. Blake. He had a tendency to air views on policy dangerous to national unity. What was needed at this critical moment in the country's history was absolute obedience to the dictates of their gifted leaders. Mr. Blake was a literary man of eminence, as his many contributions to the columns of *The Star* proved, but the political ideas of literary men were usually beneath contempt. Mr. Blake was a striking example of this. Extracts from his political articles in *The Dawn* followed. A concluding paragraph applied to Maurice all the epithets promised by Breslin, but without rancour.

While Maurice was reading this news in *The Star*, in the private sitting-room reserved for him at Leary's Hotel, Father Malone was announced.

The priest was pale and excited. His lips moved to speak, but no sound came. He shook Maurice's hand, and dropped it hurriedly. He took off his glasses and wiped them nervously with his handkerchief.

Maurice said, "This is a happy chance—I was looking forward to seeing you. I intended to call to-morrow when I'm due in your parish. Take that chair and make yourself comfortable."

"Yes, yes," Father Malone said abstractedly, his eyes fixed on Maurice with a sort of unseeing stare. He rubbed away at his glasses, but made no movement towards the chair. Suddenly he started,

as if waking from a dream, said "Yes, yes," and sat down.

Maurice sat near, in another armchair, and waited somewhat apprehensively.

The priest put on his glasses. He took several minutes to fix the clips satisfactorily behind his ears. He stared at the fire.

"How have you been all those years?" Maurice said, feeling stupid and almost tongue-tied.

The priest looked at him reproachfully. "I never expected it of you, Maurice," he said in a flat tone.

"What didn't you expect?"

"Oh, the sin of it," Malone said bitterly, wringing his hands, and speaking as if to the fire.

"Of what?"

"This marriage—this unhappy, unhappy marriage—that's no marriage in the sight of God. Oh, Maurice, that you, of all men, should do it."

The feeling of anger that momentarily arose in Maurice gave way to one of pity. Unconsciously he put out his hand and laid it on the priest's sleeve.

"Don't feel it so much, Father," he said anxiously, thinking only of the need of sympathy expressed in the priest's face.

"You feel it then yourself," Malone said, looking up hopefully. "You're sorry for it—you'll do your best to set it right."

"Sorry for what? Set what right?"

"The sin—the marriage," Father Malone said, a little impatiently.

Maurice stared at him. Again his anger gave way, and he said gently—

"I'm sorry if anything I have done gives you

pain. For the rest, I'm conscious of neither sin nor sorrow," he added, shutting his lips tightly.

Father Malone extended his hands in a quick, despairing movement towards the fire.

"It's always the way with the love of a woman," he said sadly; "it hardens a man's heart to the grace of God. Why, if I reckoned them up according to the rules of moral theology, the sins you've committed in this miserable affair are as numerous, maybe, as the hairs on your head. But, take heart. Our Lord was never the One to crush the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax," he added with a wan smile.

"I'm neither a bruised reed nor smoking flax," Maurice said with an answering smile.

"God help us, we all are. But that's neither here nor there. You're going to rise out of it now, there's a good fellow."

Maurice stood up and gazed down at the priest's expectant face.

"You've already said enough to make me angry with almost any one else in the world," he said quietly. "I don't want to quarrel with you for holding your view—but I don't want to hear it again. Try to conceive that another view—mine, for instance—may be right. I'm married, and I'll expect you to remember it. Don't quarrel with me—don't," he added appealingly.

"But you're not married—you're living in sin—the *Ne Temere*," the priest said in amazement.

Maurice shrugged his shoulders, and walked up and down the room.

"What would you have me do?" he said dryly, standing by the corner of the fireplace.

The priest gave a sigh of relief. "That's talking reason," he said brightening. He held his clasped hands to his lips and thought for a few moments. "I saw his lordship before coming to see you—in fact, 'twas he that sent for me," Malone said timidly.

"Oh, indeed!" Maurice said dryly.

"He may be a hard man in many things—I won't be denying that it's not always easy to see what he's driving at. But I'm sure he's all right in this—he couldn't be otherwise, and the law of God at stake."

"Some Roman lawyer made it the law of God here a couple of years ago. Up to then my marriage would have been valid. One would think God knew His own mind better," Maurice said harshly. "Perhaps He does, in spite of *Ne Temere*? But go on."

The priest shook his head sadly. "After all, you're a layman and can't grasp these things," he said slowly. "I don't much like the Church myself to be making new sins—to tell you the truth, I don't like it at all. But once she says the word—why, it is God speaking, and there's nothing for it but to obey," he said simply. "But you've put me off the track. Where was I? Oh yes. The bishop was very kind. He isn't always that to me, I may tell you, so it shows you how much he has taken your affair to heart. He admitted even that he was a bit rushed into the steps he has already taken (the mission and the like), by Father James Mahon—he's a bad egg, may God forgive him—and that he'd far rather for the good of religion and the glory of God that the matter was settled quietly."

"Well?" Maurice said interested.

"Well, the long and the short of it is this. If the woman——"

"Who?"

"The woman—oh—well, Mrs. Blake can be got to consent to a marriage by a priest in a Catholic church, he'd be willing to forget everything, and make it easy for you about the dispensation and all that—but you'd have to repair the scandal, of course——"

"Scandal?" Maurice interrupted.

"The injury you've done to God, to our Holy Church, to the bishop, to the pious faithful."

"My God! Isn't it I who am injured—and my wife and child?" Maurice said angrily.

"The sinner does suffer a little, of course; but think of God, Maurice. It's He——"

"Oh," Maurice said wearily. "But go on. How am I to repair this scandal?"

"By retiring from the contest—I'd wish myself there was some other way. Timmins is a disgrace to a Christian community, and no more a real Nationalist than my old boot. But the bishop was firm. He said the honour of God, which was insulted by your action, demanded at least that much reparation from you."

Maurice laughed. "And if the—woman doesn't consent?" he asked dryly, pressing the forefinger of each hand tightly against the thumb.

"You'd have to separate from her at once. Every minute you're living with her you're living in sin. You'd keep the child, of course; any convent'd take her off your hands."

Maurice gazed at the fire. He turned and looked Father Malone all over.

"And you are a man?" he said, as if to himself.

"And the wonder of it is," he added, letting his eyes wander to the fire, "that he is, and a good man too in a hundred ways."

"You're a bit shaken by that," the priest said sympathetically. "But the grace of God'll come to your help and you'll soon get over it."

Maurice said nothing. After a pause Father Malone continued.

"The worst of it is that after doing all that Timmins'll get in in any event ; for you see you'd still have the scandal to repair, and nothing less than your retirement would satisfy his lordship on that head."

Maurice smiled wearily. "Hadn't I better stick to my wife and to the contest?" he asked. "I might keep out Timmins."

Father Malone blushed. "I was thinking more of your soul all along," he said reproachfully.

"I'm sure you were," Maurice said impulsively. "You think I've lost my soul. I think I'm nearer to finding it. Can you be friends with a lost soul?"

The priest took his hand and shook it warmly. Then he seemed uneasy. After a few moments his face lit up.

"I'm right in keeping friends," he said gravely. "You see if I give you up you might go from bad to worse. And if I keep in with you I might get you to come round yet."

He spoke of his mountain parish. "There were few anxious to take it," he said, "but I'm as happy there as a king. I'm far from the bishop, and that's sometimes a God-send, and I've no priest over me or under me, and that helps to keep a man out of harm's way. I——" All the time

he was evidently thinking of Maurice, for he broke off suddenly, "To go back to your soul again——"

But Maurice interrupted him.

"You won't get there now," he said emphatically. "I'm due at Duffy's for the last ten minutes."

"They'll beat you. There are so many things I have to say to you. Couldn't you give——"

Maurice wouldn't re-open the discussion. On their way downstairs the priest said—

"You're wrong, but I don't like the method by which you're to be attacked—a good many don't. Only let me talk to you——"

In the hall Dr. Fitzpatrick almost ran into them. "Oh!" he said, "Father Malone, and—yes, it is—Mr. Blake. Give him good advice, Father."

"Hush!" the priest said looking round anxiously.

"Mum is the word—I know everything—but I'm as safe as a——"

"Leaking kettle," the priest said roughly.

"Father Malone will have his joke," Fitzpatrick said complacently to Maurice. "Giving in?" he whispered. "I'd strongly advise you"—he turned towards Father Malone—"for the sake of religion and all that." Again to Maurice, "A family man myself! so I didn't turn up after Duggan told me how matters stood that first night: he had it direct from his lordship. But I'm not strait-laced, not by any manner of means. No prejudice against you whatever."

Maurice must have looked very angry for Father Malone took his arm and dragged him away; while Fitzpatrick muttered in amazement, "And I only trying to be friendly."

On Friday night Maurice addressed an enthusiastic meeting in the market square. On Saturday morning the *Liscannow News* gave brief biographies of the two candidates, stating, without comment, that Maurice was married to a Protestant lady, Miss Alice Barton, in a Dublin Registry Office.

Later in the day the nominations took place quietly.

CHAPTER XXIII

FATHER MAHON rang for the lamp, pulled down the blinds to shut out the sodden, dark grey sky, and took his seat in the little circle round his study fire.

"The sun hasn't gone down yet. I hope to God the darkness isn't for rain. It'd spoil the mission to-night," he said, spreading his hands to the cheerful blaze. "God forbid," a rubicund priest, in the black habit of the Seraphites, said unctuously. He twirled his thumbs, which just met across his paunch, his hands resting on it as if on a cushion. Little grey eyes gleamed under his bushy eyebrows. Layers of cheek, overhanging his jaws, hid his collar. A few yellow stumps of teeth protruded from a wide mouth. He smacked his lips. The few, wiry hairs, surrounding his tonsure, seemed to stand erect. "But God is very good to us in the way of weather, especially on the opening night—isn't He, Father Mansuetudo?"

"He is that, Father Prior, and He's sure not to fail us on a great occasion like this," Father Mansuetudo said emphatically. He shut his thin lips austerely, till the skin was drawn tight over his high cheek-bones and narrow forehead. His eyes, set close together, almost nestling against a long thin nose, gleamed as he added, "Do you remember that time, Father Benignus—Father Prior, I should say—when we had to denounce that scandal up in the North? It was raining cats and dogs all day, and it

cleared up within an hour of the mission service—a special Providence, I call it,” he looked around questioningly. “You were in great fettle that night, Father Prior.”

“Oh, God fits the back to the burthen,” the prior said carelessly. “It’s getting late, Father Mahon, and I think we ought to be having the dinner. I like to have it well settled down always before I begin to preach.”

“It’s only ten to four, and four is the hour,” Father Mahon said firmly. “Besides, Father Delahunty is coming. It’s like him, I must say, to be wandering about the country, dining out, and he having a mission of his own to-night, too.”

“I wish *I* could be away,” a slim priest sighed. He stroked tenderly the auburn curl on his forehead, and pulled his white cuffs well down over his knuckles. “There’s a good deal of rot about all this fuss, you know—and I’m missing a musical party in Liscannow. She’s a likely piece of goods enough too. I don’t know but I’m half sorry for her. There’s no telling what I mightn’t be doing myself if the like of her put the comether on me, and I wasn’t tied down as I am.”

Father Mahon and Father Mansuetudo frowned.

Father Benignus chuckled. “You’re a gay lad—a regular Lothario. It must be a trial now, Father Mahon, to have a curate like him—all the girls running after him ; I remember my own young days. Keep a chain on him, Mahon.”

Father Mansuetudo gave a hollow laugh. “One of Father Prior’s little jokes—in the privacy of the family, you know,” he said in anxious explanation.

Father Benignus chuckled at some memory. “Gay dog,” he murmured.

"This is too serious a matter for joking," Father Mahon said frowning. He glared angrily at his curate. "I don't mind your being a fool so long as you do your work, Father Brogan," he spluttered, "but I won't have my curate lifting his voice against me in my own parish. I'll—I'll——" He glanced at the two Seraphites, who were watching him, Father Mansuetudo anxiously, Father Benignus with an amused grin, and tried to check his temper. "This is a momentous occasion, Father Benignus," he said ponderously. "This fellow, Blake, has pitted himself against me—there is also the great virtue of purity! and we have to maintain the authority of the Church and her laws. I hope I'm safe in trusting it entirely to your hands?—no levity——?"

"Oh, I'll diddle him all right," Father Benignus said, striking the arm of his chair with his open palm as if crushing a fly.

"He's as solemn as a judge in the pulpit," Father Mansuetudo said assuringly. "You never heard him? The eloquence pours out of him like water out of a barrel—and his big voice!—the hammer of the Lord, we call him in the order," he added admiringly.

Father Benignus smacked his lips complacently. "The sooner I'll have that dinner, the better I'll have my wind back," he said, his hands straying feelingly over his paunch.

There was a knock at the front door. In a few minutes Father Delahunty came in. As he shook hands with Father Mahon, the servant announced dinner.

"Oh, Seraphites!" Delahunty said. "Father Benignus, and Father Mansuetudo too! 'Dad,

Mahon, you're going to give it to poor Blake hot. 'Mary had a little lamb, and she was meek and mild,'" he hummed.

"You should have had me for your mission, Delahunty, my boy," Father Benignus said boisterously, when they had taken their seats in the dining-room.

"No fireworks for me this time. Cassidy wouldn't have it—he's never far wrong. Nothing'd do him but a pair of Jesuits—he picked them himself, too—warranted mild."

"They're too mealy-mouthed for a job like this," Benignus said, fixing his napkin under his many chins.

"That's just it—butter wouldn't melt in the mouths of the pair we have. Besides, Cassidy has reduced them to pulp by this. They're opening on temperance to-night——"

Father Mahon paused in his carving. "What?" he shouted.

"Temperance," Delahunty repeated, pouring a little whiskey into his tumbler. "Shall I help you, Father Benignus?"

"Do. But you needn't be too careful about the measuring."

"Yes, temperance. And why wouldn't they? Neither of the poor men drink. They're bubbling over with cold water—Cassidy is in that line himself too."

"But the bishop's instructions—the *Ne Temere*—the whole opening sermon—and to be touched on every night up to the election," Father Mahon said, in a series of crescendo shouts.

"Father Benignus is watching that slab of mutton on your fork like a hawk. Don't let

it be getting cold on him," Father Delahunty said dryly.

Father Mahon dashed the mutton on a plate recklessly. "Send it down to Father Brogan for ham—if you want it," he said angrily, almost throwing the plate at Father Benignus. "This is a nice business," he went on—"downright insubordination. I venture to say you'll be the only parish in the diocese not doing your duty to-night."

"It's queer how men put things differently," Delahunty said, sipping his whiskey and water. "That fool of a Cassidy of mine has some notion that he's keeping the parish decent—'It'll be an oasis in a desert of shame for the next week at least,' he says. And that's why he's sprinkling it with cold water. 'It's cooler,' he says, 'in election time than the kind of blue vitriol Benignus here'll be spouting.'"

"He's a damn funny codger," Father Benignus said, with his mouth full.

Father Mansuetudo frowned. "Would you put it that way, Father Prior?" he said, with a trace of asperity. His eyes almost met, so close were they together. "I should rather say self-willed—dangerous—temerarious—almost in fact, quasi-heretical for flouting the authority of his bishop, apart altogether from the disrespectful way he spoke of you, Father Prior—an insult to our Superior and to our holy order."

"Of course, of course," Father Benignus said, his little eyes blinking rapidly. "I've often told you, Father," he said gravely, "that though I see the humorous side of a situation, I'm none the less blind to its deplorable circumstances—a rash young man! likely to come to a bad end."

Father Mansuetudo gave a sigh of relief. "I ought to have known you better, Father Prior," he said apologetically.

Father Mahon brooded over his untasted dinner. He dabbed a knife viciously in his mutton.

"The bishop will hear of this, Father Delahunty," he said aggressively. "A parish priest is—a parish priest, and you won't escape responsibility by bringing in Cassidy."

"What wonderful insight you have, James," Delahunty said ironically. "But I didn't tell you all that Cassidy said," he went on with a chuckle. "'Delahunty, my boy,' he said to me—he looks on me as a gossoon in petticoats,—‘that was a great trick of sending round them marked copies of the *Liscannow News* with the account of Blake's registry marriage,' he said, ‘laying a train of powder in every voter's house for the missioners to put a spark to to-night and blow up the poor devil with. But damn the fizzle even there'll be out of that same powder in this parish the way I'll have it deluged in cold water,' he said."

"But Cassidy—and you, too—is supposed to be a priest of God," Father Mahon thundered.

"It's queer now," Delahunty said calmly, "that them are the very words that Cassidy himself used. 'And I'm damned,' he said besides, 'if I'll have God turned into an electioneering agent.'"

"This is as good as a play—I don't think I'm missing much in not being in Liscannow," Father Brogan whispered to Father Mansuetudo.

"It's a scandal—a scandal," Father Mansuetudo muttered angrily. He looked across at his prior; but Father Benignus was intent on his plate. There was no movement in his face, but his breath came

in short, quick gasps through his nose, and the napkin, on his breast, was shaking violently.

"The flame Father Prior'll kindle to-night will spread through the length and breadth of the diocese," Father Mansuetudo said ecstatically, the light of vision in his eyes. "And there are thirty of our Fathers in other parishes—no temporizing Jesuits, but true Seraphites—to fan the torch with their holy zeal." His lips moved as if in prayer.

"No doubt it'll be a great bonfire entirely," Father Delahunty said thoughtfully. "Though the Lord only knows who'll be burnt up in it in the end—the people that lit it as likely as not. But as Cassidy'd say, may the devil mend them. Do you know what, James," turning towards Mahon: "I'm taking a disgust to coursing for the last couple of days. I'm beginning to think there's something to be said for the hare."

Father Mahon was speechless with anger. He gulped down mutton and cabbage and ham and potatoes as fast as his fork could convey them to his mouth. He threw down his knife and fork at last, saying—

"The Church must be purged of its traitors."

"Amen, amen," Father Mansuetudo said fervently.

"That reminds me of a good story," Father Benignus said, wiping his greasy mouth with a corner of his napkin. "No more, thank you, Father James. I'm as taut as a drum—no room for anything but the punch. A red-haired woman once came——"

"Oh, that one!" Father Mansuetudo said uneasily. "Isn't it a little too—too——"

"He's as scared as a young woman the night

of her wedding," Father Benignus said indulgently. "Don't you know, Father, that I never cross the border?"

"You lean damn far over the mearing fence, then," Father Delahunty said dryly.

Father Benignus chuckled. "Besides, Father Mansuetudo," he said gravely, "I always told you there was a good moral in it."

"I'm sorry I interrupted you," his subordinate said meekly, his faith in Father Prior enabling him, though hesitatingly, to move mountains.

It was a long story, and was interrupted twice by the servant who came in to remove the plates, and again with hot water. Father Mahon was attentive only for short intervals, when his harsh laugh grated through his teeth. For the most part he was following thoughts of his own, his lips and face twitching spasmodically. He made a glass of punch and passed round the decanter. He did not notice the close of the tale. Father Benignus himself gave a loud guffaw and swallowed the remainder of his punch. Father Mansuetudo smiled feebly. Father Delahunty looked through the amber liquid in his glass and said, "Poor Blake." Father Brogan leant back in his chair and shook with laughter.

"The best I ever heard," he said, short of breath. "That's where you missionaries have the pull over us poor seculars," he added, regretfully. "Knocking round the country so much, you get the pick of the basket of all the prime stories going."

Father Benignus looked at him with a more kindly eye.

"Oh, I've better than that," he said, chuckling.

"It's nearly six o'clock—we ought to be going to the church," Father Mansuetudo said hastily.

Father Benignus sighed. "Well, well—the week is long. Just remind me, Father Brogan, another night, of Paudeen Rafferty. That——"

Father Mansuetudo moved back his chair.

"Oh, it's time, is it," Father Mahon said. "Run down, Father Brogan, and see that everything is ready—that the collectors are at the doors, and at the box."

Father Brogan went reluctantly, Father Mansuetudo at his heels.

"I'll not stir out of this till I have another glass to oil my throat," Father Benignus said, grasping the decanter. "It's as dry as a parched pea this minute, and I'll be putting a great strain on it down below."

"You won't fail?" Father Mahon said doubtfully.

"I'll fry the lad till he wriggles like a live eel in hot grease," Father Benignus said good-humouredly. "That's very good whiskey, Mahon."

Father Delahunty stood with his back to the fire. Father Mahon came towards the fireplace and said, with an effort to control his temper—

"You know you pushed me too far, Delahunty—I nearly forgot the laws of hospitality."

Father Delahunty smiled. "You have that virtue, James—I wish——" he broke off. "Is there no moving you? The man's own parish too."

Father Mahon straightened himself and his chin protruded. "I, at least, know my duty to the Church."

"L'Eglise c'est moi."

"What's that?" Father Mahon said suspiciously.

"It's Dutch for my grandmother," Father Delahunty said moodily.

Father Mahon looked at his watch, then, impatiently at Father Benignus, who was just finishing his punch.

"You won't even tell that swipe to deal decently with the subject?" Delahunty said in a low tone, appealingly.

"The guilty have only themselves to blame. Come on, Father Benignus."

"You're coming down to hear me?" the prior said boisterously, laying an affectionate arm on Delahunty's shoulder. "I feel sure I'll surpass myself to-night—I'm that worked up."

Father Delahunty did not seem to listen. "I must get back to Cassidy and decency," he murmured to himself.

He lingered by the front gate, waiting for his trap. Father Mahon and the missionary passed out, Father Benignus clasping a crucifix, about two feet long, to his breast. The silver figure, stretched on the cross, shone impassive in the light of a newly risen moon.

Father Delahunty looked from the crucifix to the missionary's face and muttered, "I'm damned if it isn't nearly enough to make one have some respect for the Protestants."

"So long, then, if you won't come to hear a treat," Father Benignus said cheerily, trotting with short steps beside Father Mahon's long stride.

"Where does that Blake and his whore live?" he asked.

"In the village," Father Mahon said gruffly.

"See, if they're not belled out before me and

Mansuetudo are done with them—great crowds entirely,” he added, as they passed several groups of people.

“They’re a stiff-necked lot,” Father Mahon growled.

“Wait till I pour the grace of God over them—I’ve a wonderful gift in that way—glory be to His Holy Name,” Father Benignus said.

The path from the church gate to the tower door was lined with canvas tents, open in front. Smoky oil lamps cast a feeble light on the many objects of religion exposed for sale on rough wooden shelves—highly coloured pictures, cheap plaster statues, rosaries, little leaden saints, holy water stoups, a varied assortment of paper-covered books, ranging from “Hell opened to Christians” to “The Imitation of Christ,” with realistic illustrations. One stall, more ambitious than the others, was made brilliant by a naphtha flare. The owner, a ferret-face little man with bleary eyes, ran after Father Benignus and pulled his cloak.

“Hullo, Jimmy. Always on my track.”

“And why wouldn’t I, Father Prior, and you such a seller.”

“What’s your best line this time?”

“Red and blue plaster saints—dirt cheap, and a new brand of crucifix.”

“All right—I’ll lay stress on them.”

“I won’t be forgetting your reverence—God Almighty pour blessings down on your head this night.”

Father Benignus bowed left and right, waved his crucifix, in benediction, in response to the doffing of hats, curtseys, and salutations of “God bless you, Father.” The thin line of people along the stalls

merged into a surging crowd at the front door. The rattle of money in the wooden collecting boxes and the strident voices of the collectors rose above the din.

"Keep back there—crushing won't get you in without your tuppences."

"'Twas never more than a penny before."

"Any one that hasn't tuppence in the heel of his fist'll go out by the scruff of the neck."

Father Mahon had passed on. Father Benignus listened a while.

"Maurice Blake." "His wife isn't his wife at all, they tell me." "The holy missionaries'll throw a light on it." "If he was a Turk itself with ten wives I'd give him my vote." "Whist, there's the missionary behind you."

"Wait till I talk to 'em," Father Benignus chuckled to himself, and walked on towards the sacristy. "A full house," he said cheerfully to Father Brogan, who was standing beside a wooden sentry box with "Gallery, sixpence" in large letters over the ticket window. "It ought to nett out well. I thought Mahon'd forget this side of the business, he's so bent on hounding out the member fellow."

"Catch him forgetting this, even if they made a pope of him," Brogan said with a leer.

Inside the church Father Mahon was busy, driving and packing people into seats. "Scrooge up—there's room for another there." There was some sullen murmuring, but no active resistance. "I'm in no one's way here. Can't you let me be, Father." "Move on, I tell you," with a free use of the wrist and knee that would have done credit to a Rugby forward. There was a hum of conversation in which "Blake, Maurice, wife," rose to the

surface. "Silence!" Father Mahon shouted. "Remember you are in the house of God."

The stream through the doors ceased. Every seat was occupied. The passages were filled with swaying worshippers. Miss Clancy and her father and mother were seated within the sanctuary close to the soutaned and surpliced Father Mahon and Father Brogan. The gaunt figure of Father Mansuetudo appeared at the sacristy door. He advanced to the altar, knelt in prayer for a minute, elbowed his way to the pulpit, and gave out the rosary to which the congregation made response. As he drew near the end, Father Benignus knelt at the altar steps and prayed silently. Father Mansuetudo left the pulpit. The kneeling worshippers rose to their feet. Before they had settled in their seats, or had found a comfortable standing position, Father Benignus was in the pulpit, the silver crucifix, gleaming against the black wood, held aloft in his right hand, while with his left he wiped the sweat off his forehead with a red and white check handkerchief.

He began quietly, his resonant voice filling the church. Unfortunately the mission coincided with a contested election. But their first duty was to their souls. Outside the church the turmoil of an election might claim them for a brief moment, for he knew they were good Irishmen. But whether in the quiet of the church, in peace with God, or outside, amid all the winds of controversy, during the time of this holy mission they were to keep God in the forefront of their words, their thoughts, and their actions. They were Irishmen, and were no doubt rightly proud of it. But first and before all they were Catholics, soldiers of God and of His Holy

Church. They were slaves, rightly struggling to be free. He'd say nothing of politics beyond this, that the great freedom, the only freedom that lasted into the next world, that landed a man in heaven, or kept him out of hell, was to be found, and found only, in absolute obedience to the Catholic Church, the one true religion of Jesus Christ, Who was speaking to them to-night through his humble lips. But to-night he intended to talk of religion only—of the great sacrament of marriage.

Every Catholic that was properly married was a temple of the Holy Ghost, and had for a symbol the mystic union of Christ and the Church. Every Catholic who wasn't rightly married was a spawning ground of hell.

And what was being rightly married?

He boggled somewhat over the explanation. Father Mahon frowned. "He knows less theology than you do, and that's saying a good deal," he muttered angrily to Father Brogan.

But Father Benignus had again got into his stride. "You see how this beautiful *Ne Temere* decree simplifies matters. A marriage of a Catholic, say, with a Protestant in a registry office, that used to be a valid marriage, though it was always damnable, is no longer valid."

Loud talk broke out here and there in the church.

"Silence," he thundered, "while the voice of God is speaking." He waved the crucifix violently. When silence was restored he continued, "This is what every good Catholic here has to remember to-night: since the passing of that noble decree every Catholic man married to a Protestant woman——" he paused, evidently in doubt as to whether he

would reverse the sexes under each religious heading. But he only repeated, "Every Catholic man married to a Protestant woman in a registry office is no more married in the sight of God than the cats prowling round the streets at night."

"Oh, my God, my God!" Mary Blake moaned aloud from a side pew.

"In a registry office—mind that—it's important. His wife is no better than a woman off the streets, and his children are——" he paused dramatically. "But I won't sully my lips with vile names—though, after all, what are they but the protest of the holy virtue of purity against abominable vice. If, in your natural indignation, you are tempted to use them, I, for one, would find it hard to blame you," his voice trailed off on a sorrowful note.

"Come out of this, woman," Tom Blake said, taking his wife roughly by the arm. She followed him with a scared face as he elbowed his way through the thronged passage. Jim Reardon, his wife, and half a dozen young men rose to follow. In a moment all the congregation seemed to be engaged in loud argument. Father Mahon stood at the altar rails, gesticulating furiously.

"Stop," Father Benignus shouted, in a voice that dominated the church. He stood on tiptoe, and held the crucifix high above his head with a rigid arm. "Stand still, and be silent in the name of God."

There was a sudden hush. Even Tom stood.

"In scenes like this before now—and the virtue isn't gone out of the priest of God even to-day—the voices that interrupted were struck dumb, and people that attempted to leave their seats were gripped to them tight."

"Though he's a queer man itself, maybe we ought to go back," Minnie said in a frightened voice.

"We're not afraid of bird-lime," Tom said defiantly. He had an easier passage now to the door.

The people held back, half scared. Several whispered, "I wouldn't make so much of him."

"Let him spit it all out." "Who heeds him?"

Tom and Minnie alone left the church. Jim Reardon and the others sank back in their seats or remained in the passage-way.

"Kneel down," Father Benignus shouted, "and make reparation to an offended God for such an outrage." Kneeling in the pulpit he said a short prayer. "No more married than prowling cats," he thundered at the top of his voice when the people had resumed their seats, and his crucifix was again in position. His squat figure seemed to distend. His eyes gleamed fire. He had the full attention of his audience now. The majority were awed, many were sullen and resentful, but all listened with necks craned forward. The shuffling of feet, in the passages and aisles, ceased. There wasn't a sound in the church except the booming voice of the preacher. He changed the crucifix to his left hand and thumped the ledge of the pulpit with his right. "What is that man? A traitor to his religion and to his Church. Every day that he persists in his sin, in his crime, he plants a crown of thorns on the head of his God. Look at our Divine Lord writhing there on the cross." He held out the crucifix. "That sinful traitor pierces His side with a lance, spits in His face." He paused, and a long-drawn sigh seemed to rend the church.

"Such things are not likely to be done in a parish like this, but if they were, what is your

duty to yourselves and to your wives and children, to your fellow-men, to your priests, to your religion, to your reviled and outraged God? This is a public sin and demands public punishment. If you have a bad tooth you pull it out, a rotten member, you cut it off."

He paused again, and then, in language of the fiercest denunciation, in metaphors that mixed and tumbled over one another, he left no place on earth or in heaven, on which a Catholic man who married a Protestant woman in a registry office should be allowed to rest the sole of an untroubled foot.

He walked like a drunken man to the sanctuary, wiping his streaming head with his handkerchief. Conversation broke out loud all over the church.

"Couldn't be better," Father Mahon said, grasping the preacher's hand.

"The hammer of the Lord," Father Mansuetudo murmured with glistening eyes.

"There are a queer lot of humbugs in the world," Father Brogan said, admiring his sleeve links.

"I feel in the marrow of my bones that I did it," Father Benignus said huskily, "but Lord, I've the drought of a limekiln on me."

CHAPTER XXIV

IN an hour the whole division had awakened from apathy. In every chapel yard in twenty-nine parishes Maurice Blake's marriage was discussed in varying degrees of excitement; even in Father Delahunty's parish, notwithstanding the well-modulated douche of cold water, there were surmises as to the meaning of the marked passage in the *Liscannow News*. The Timminsites openly rejoiced. Blake's supporters, for the most part, spoke under their breaths, with much shaking of heads, cautiously, or slunk home quietly to discuss the situation with more freedom in the seclusion of their firesides. Some young men shouted defiance.

Maurice had dined in Liscannow with Dr. Grace, and went with him and Duffy to hear the mission sermon at the cathedral. In a back seat in one of the aisles, under the shadow of the organ gallery, he listened in vague wonder to an attack on some unnamed fiend in human form, without faith or morals or conscience, unworthy of trust, a traitor, a renegade, false to his country and to his religion. Under the fascination of the preacher's voice he hardly thought of the sermon as having any relation to himself. He could hardly take his eyes off the refined face of the speaker, his thin lips pouring out corrosive acid in silky tones, without anger or resentment, but with an occasional gleam of white

teeth, and a half-contemptuous play of the lips and nose. Once or twice Maurice glanced from the preacher to the bishop, seated on the episcopal throne, calm and impassive, wearing an air of sadness.

"Let us get out before the crowd," Duffy said, when the sermon was finished. Small groups of excited talkers were, however, already in the grounds. Men nudged one another as Maurice passed. A few jeered. Three or four of his supporters raised a feeble cheer. A group booed, half in amusement, and broke off in a laugh.

"Put that in your pipe and smoke it, Blake," one said.

"They'll have more heart in them when Timmins opens the pubs to-morrow, he has them all," Duffy said dryly. "Come along to my house. Out of respect to the holy mission we have no meeting to-night," he added bitterly.

"You didn't mind that fool in the pulpit?" Dr. Grace said as they passed through a slum street.

"Oh no," Maurice said dully.

"The smell here'd knock down a horse. Why don't you do something, Grace?" Duffy said, putting his handkerchief to his nose.

"I report these houses once a month—waste-paper basket," Grace said, shrugging his shoulders.

"Who owns them?"

"Timmins—the worst of them."

This somehow roused Maurice. He looked at the wretched houses, with their broken doors, roofs, and windows.

"Can nothing be done?" he said.

"We're making the best effort we can in this

election," Grace said gravely. After a few seconds he laughed. "Often I think we are taking ourselves too seriously. Fitz may be right after all in taking life as a joke. I almost regret I wasn't built like him."

"You don't," Maurice said gently.

"Well, maybe I don't. But there you are," waving his hand towards the houses. "Timmins is killing off these poor devils like flies. The death-rate in this street would make your hair stand on end. The few that are left'll be shouting 'up Timmins' during the week in sheer gratitude for being alive. But maybe, they're cynical, and think that this excitement will make him drink himself to death."

"Poor fellow," Maurice said.

This made Grace angry. "Nonsense," he said roughly.

Maurice looked at him in astonishment. The usually mild face was distorted.

"You're strong enough in action, Blake, but you have too many soft spots in you. Poor Timmins! indeed. Poor Timmins! If you were a doctor in this damned town—sentimental clap-trap," he muttered as Duffy opened a door with a latch-key.

When Duffy had turned on the gas in his study, Grace began again. "I don't know what's come over me," he said apologetically. "It's the hypocrisy of that sermon, I suppose. You've tried to act decently all your life and now you're going to be broken——"

"But I won't be broken," Maurice said quietly.

"For Timmins, the tried and proved lover of his country," Grace went on heatedly, without noticing

the interruption. "My God ! it's enough to make a man sick. Timmins puts up stained glass windows in the cathedral and does jobs for the bishop on the local boards in the intervals of D.T.'s——"

"You're down on Timmins because the fever always starts in Friar's Row. But it's the priests we're up against now," Duffy interrupted. "He's mad on sanitation," he added wryly to Maurice. "Look here, Blake, I've made a few notes of that sermon. They'll come in useful in a petition if they beat us."

He held out an envelope on which he had scribbled in pencil. Maurice read the notes and dropped the envelope into the fire.

"I'll get in by votes or not at all," he said.

"Quixotish," Duffy said with a shrug. "Come let us draw up the programme for the week. . . ."

Maurice had only a confused impression of the week preceding the poll. He saw the best and the worst of men. Friends that he had known and loved from childhood looked at him askance, or passed him by without recognition. Mere acquaintances and strangers became his warm friends. Irritation, anger, joy, resentment, and a fierce pleasure moved him in turns. There was no rest for his feet, for his mind, for his emotions. Every day supporters deserted him. Every day he discovered finer qualities in the friends that remained. He was hooted and jeered at, pelted with rotten eggs, called ribald names. Alice was rescued from a mob of roughs, who rushed her through the main street of Liscannow, by Dr. Fitzpatrick, who had now openly taken Timmins's side. Father Mahon, who saw the attack, called it "a splendid

display of religious enthusiasm." The windows of Driscoll's cottage were broken : Teigue Donlon and Dempsey were caught hanging dead cats to the gate posts. Mary Blake begged Maurice, on her knees, to go back to Dublin and give up the contest. Then she kissed him and said she'd scrape the eyes out of the mean hounds that called little Maureen a bastard. He had to give up his rooms in Leary's Hotel. Mrs. Leary said she couldn't sleep at night with the fear of hell that was on her, on the head of him, since she was with the missionary at confession. From all districts he heard that the attacks from the pulpit had become more pointed ; that persuasion and threats of punishment, temporal and eternal, were being used freely in the confessional. His marriage was not referred to by Timmins or his helpers, in their public speeches, but Maurice's speeches were interrupted by constant allusions to it in the vilest language.

Two nights before the poll, at a committee meeting in Grace's rooms, Tom said, " We're losing ground every day. Monday last, in spite of the big splash on Sunday night and all, we might have won."

" Timmins isn't making much of a fight—Fitzzy tells me he's nearly done up. And our fellows here are magnificent," Dr. Grace said hopefully.

" It's different in the country places. The preaching every night, and the back-door business in the confessional, is telling on 'em more there. I'm not sure of my own father-in-law. I'm near certain he's agin us. And my father even is keeping as quiet as a mouse. Only that he has a spite agin Father Mahon for fifty pounds he says he did him out of once, it's as likely as not that he'd be voting agin Maurice."

"It's extraordinary," Grace said musingly. "I've given up being angry about it—it's beyond me. This morning I was called in to a case in Friars Row—typhus, I fear, aggravated by drink. 'I beg your pardon, doctor,' the fellow said as I was going, 'for throwing that brick-bat at you at the meeting last night'—fortunately it only knocked my hat off—'but I had a drop of drink in me.' 'You might have thrown it at Timmins, who gave you this fever,' I said. 'Sure,' he said, 'the fever is only the will of God, but you're on the side of the devil himself, may God pardon you. Do you think you'll have me out on the poll-day, doctor?' " He laughed heartily. "We're all on the side of Timmins. Even I try to cure his victims. You haven't the ghost of a chance, Blake. If you were only a slum owner now, dispensing the will of God in the shape of typhus, and giving a good Catholic people the chance of practising the virtue of resignation, you might——"

"For God's sake, keep Grace off his hobby," Duffy said anxiously.

Shouts arose from the street. A drum was beaten loudly beneath the window. There was a crash of glass, and a potato bounded off the wall on to the table round which the committee sat.

"They're out from the mission—and in a holy mood, God bless them," Duffy said calmly. "Come along—we have a meeting in the market square. One—two—three—four panes gone already, and there's no use in getting new glass before Saturday night. The whole of the windows'll probably be gone by then. We have a glazier on our side, haven't we, Tracy?"

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On the morning of the poll Bourneen was white with snow freshly fallen in the night. The sky was clear but sullen, almost black against the dead white of the ground. The slanted roof of the police barrack sparkled more brightly than the bleak sun itself. Maureen stood at the door of the cottage in silent wonder.

"Maureen's powder," she said at last.

"Snow," Alice said.

"Maureen touch," the child said, suiting the action to the word. "Cold," she said, with the awe of one making a scientific discovery.

Alice took her up in her arms, clasped her to her breast and kissed her warmly.

"Daddy coming?"

"Not yet, dear," Alice said, drawing the child closer.

Maureen fingered a pin in the collar of her mother's blouse, murmuring, "Pretty, pretty."

Men passed the gate on their way to the polling booth, in the school-house near by, but Alice was looking beyond them, to the sharp, white peak of Slieve Mor piercing the leaden sky. It was all so still and peaceful. Even sounds had a depth and clearness which only intensified the silence that seemed to brood over the landscape. The latch of the gate clicked and Bessy Reilly came up the path. Alice put down the child and smiled a welcome.

"How is the man of the house?" Bessy said, jerking her head towards Driscoll's bedroom.

"Not well."

"Why, you've everything done," Bessy grumbled, looking round the kitchen.

"Maureen got toast—milk," the child said.

"I was up all night and I had to do something," Alice said.

Bessy potted about. "It's women that do the suffering. The poor old master—not but he'd rather go down the hill without being a trouble to any one. Still there you are—and you having enough on your mind as it is, and your own man going to be beat, they say."

Alice's tired eyes brightened and a faint flush tinged her cheeks. She touched Maureen's hair with her fingers.

"Oh no ; he'll win," she said confidently.

"Well, 'tis you're the queer woman, to go on saying the like of that, and Tom Blake himself telling me a minute ago up at the school gate, that there was as much chance of it as of me being a queen."

"Who knows, but you are," Alice said gently.

"It's the want of sleep that's rising in your head. If you'd only go and lie down for a bit, I'd look after the child as if 'twas my own," Bessy said anxiously.

"Would you warm the chicken jelly? I might get the master to take a little," Alice said, going towards the bedroom.

Driscoll smiled as she entered. He tried to sit up but he fell back exhausted. He panted for a few seconds.

"I'm better—feeling grand entirely," he murmured in a weak voice. "I'm well able to get up—I must go out and give my vote."

"He won't need it. And the doctor said you weren't to get up. He's going to win—by ever so much," she said.

"Tom told me the truth yesterday," he said reproachfully.

"Then he'll need the vote less," she said.

"I'd feel the better for it—and to give a vote for him in his own schoolhouse too."

He lay quite still with his eyes closed. Bessy brought in the chicken jelly. He took some, and asked again to be allowed to get up. Alice shook her head. He lay back and shut his eyes.

Bessy beckoned Alice out of the room. "I doubt but we ought to be getting the priest for him," she said in a whisper.

Alice shuddered. "Is it necessary? But, of course, it is," she added hastily.

"We might get the young curate coming on the night. I wouldn't like to bring in the big man and he in that temper."

After dinner Driscoll slept quietly. Alice went for a rest in her own room. It was almost dark when she awoke with a start. On her way through the kitchen, Maureen called out from Bessy's lap—

"Grandpa Driscoll, bye-bye. Mammy, bye-bye. Only Maureen wake-up."

Driscoll was sitting limply on the side of his bed partially dressed.

"It's no use, Alice," he said, with a flicker of his old smile. "If you don't help me, I'll go like this, and maybe fall in the snow."

She argued, but he was firm. She went in despair to Bessy, who said—

"Best let him have his way. A day more or less in this world isn't of much account to a man that's sure to have heaven for his bed. And the doctor told me he was done for this time. Maybe,

he'd die happier if his mind is set on it. I'll run out and get a few of the neighbours—decent ones—to carry him. They're round the school gate in droves."

Hinnissey and Jim Reardon helped Driscoll to the schoolhouse.

"How are they voting?" he asked.

"Most of your training, master, as far as one can know without seeing into the box, are going right, thank God. But there's bad news from other parts. And some here itself, my bad scran to 'em, are led away by the missionaries," Hinnissey said, his voice rising angrily.

A knot of men by the gate, hearing Hinnissey's last sentence, booed vigorously, and shouted, "Up Timmins—down with adultery."

"It isn't Teigue Donlon I see among them? And the man with the stick raised is like your father, Jim," Driscoll said uneasily.

Hinnissey hurried him forward. "Sure, master, 'tis your eyes are good yet, seeing that likeness! Two mountainy fellows they are, and the living image of the men you mentioned. Any one'd be deceived in the darkness of the night that's near upon us. Wouldn't he, Jim?"

"He would then," Jim Reardon said hesitatingly.

While his name was being looked up in the register, the old man gazed round the school sadly, at the torn maps and stained walls. He was handed a voting paper.

"It's going to rack and ruin," he said feebly.

He had to be reminded twice to fill the paper. "That's a good day's work," he said with a smile as it disappeared into the ballot-box.

At his own gate his head fell on Hinnissey's shoulder. They laid him on his bed unconscious.

"The priest, the priest, for the love of God," Bessy Reilly said excitedly. Driscoll opened his eyes. "But maybe, he wouldn't want him yet awhile, as the life is in him again," she said.

"I think it's time I had him—I haven't far to run now," he said in short breaths.

"Which of them would you rather to see you on the road?" Bessy said, as she took off his boots: "the young man or the big man?"

"It's all one to me—either one or the other can lift the hand of God over me."

"Run across for the young curate then, Jim," Bessy said with relief.

Alice helped to put Driscoll to bed. He fell back contentedly on the pillow.

"I'm ready now, when 'twill please the Lord to take me," he said with a sigh. Maureen began to cry in the kitchen. "I'd like to see her, and then I wouldn't," he said half to himself. "Take her away to bed, Bessy, out of the sight of death."

"Would you hand me my beads, Alice? They're hanging to the bedpost," he said after a few minutes. "And, now, we must prepare for the priest. That table there—that's it. I had it ready this many a year against my death. You'll find everything in the drawers—the white cloth, the candles, the crucifix. The holy water is here on the wall. Now, is there anything else? Some plain water and a towel to wash his hands, and a piece of breadcrumb to wipe the holy oil off his fingers."

He spoke with difficulty, with intervals for breath between the sentences, sometimes between the words, but with a calm seriousness, as if death were

a visitor to be received with some ceremony, yet not too ceremoniously. Fingering his beads he watched Alice moving about and placing things in order. When all was ready he said—

“I doubt if God reads the label on a person to see whether it’s Protestant or Catholic. He’s more knowledgable than all that. Soon, maybe, I’ll know the rights of things. Anyway, a saint out of heaven couldn’t tend a man better to his death—and you a Protestant, too.”

“I must send for Maurice,” Alice said brokenly.

“Don’t, then,” he said firmly, rousing himself a little. “It’s enough he has on his mind this night, and not to have the burthen of me on him. There’s only one thing I want to say to him, and I can say it to you equally well. I near did him and you a great wrong once. I tried to come between ye ; but, sure, God knew best. The things that were near at hand blinded me—Maurice’s work in the school, and in the parish. They were great things, too, in their way. But it’s only lately it dawned on me that there are greater. The love of you opened Maurice’s eyes to them. Maybe it opened mine, too. All the good that a man has is his life and his power to love. If these are chained up he’s only pottering about, fettered and useless. A free country is free men, and no man is free as long as the soul is crushed in him.”

He fell back exhausted.

Bessie beckoned excitedly from the door. She drew Alice out into the kitchen and whispered—

“The curate couldn’t be found anywhere. Jim ransacked the whole place. He isn’t at home, nor in Father James’s, nor in the chapel, nor with Miss Clancy playing the piano. And there isn’t tale or

tidings of him. So I had to pack the boy off again for the big man."

"Everything is ready," Alice said.

"There's a nice fire in the sitting-room, and the child's asleep. Maybe you'd be sitting there?" Bessy said anxiously.

"I can't leave him," Alice said, turning back towards the bedroom.

Bessie fingered her apron uneasily, threw out her hands, pursed her lips and muttered, "Well—I have done my part. If she isn't afeared, maybe—anyway, the big man can't swallow her."

Driscoll was dozing. Alice sat on the chair by the bed. Soon she was nodding, half asleep. She was awakened by Driscoll's voice.

"That's Father Mahon in the kitchen."

She started, stood up and listened, her hand on the back of the chair.

"A nice time to send for me and ye well knowing the mission sermon is to begin in a minute. Well, where is he?" came in a loud hectoring voice.

Bessy opened the door. Father Mahon bustled into the bedroom. He stopped short and glared at Alice. He muttered something, half turned, faced her again, hesitated as if he were about to speak. His lips moved inaudibly. He took hold of the chair on which her hand rested, jerking it off roughly, and sat down. She stood silent and confused.

"What are you waiting for? A man's confession is supposed to be private," he said with heavy sarcasm.

"There's nothing else I can do, Mr. Driscoll?" she said quietly to the old man, whose eyes were again closed.

"No, child—you've done everything. You're welcome, Father," he said, noticing Father Mahon for the first time.

The priest waited till Alice had shut the door behind her. He put on a purple stole, with a frown.

"Are you bad enough to be anointed?" he said roughly.

"I feel as if I was only holding on by a thread, and the doctor gave me up long ago."

"Well, begin your confession. *Benedictio Dei . . .*" He waved his hand in blessing. He bit his upper lip, frowned, and bit his nails impatiently while Driscoll was speaking.

"That's all I can remember, Father," he wound up with a faint smile, "and I beg God's pardon and yours."

"And what about the public scandal you've been giving in my parish for the last month?" Father Mahon asked violently.

"Scandal—scandal," Driscoll murmured feebly. "Maybe I was forgetting something. I spoke cross once to Bessy Reilly in front of people, but sure, I forgot it the minute after, and she took no heed of it at all."

"None of this quibbling on your death-bed," Father Mahon said angrily, pulling violently at the gold wire threads at the end of his stole.

Driscoll's jaw dropped. He gazed at the priest in feeble astonishment. He tried to move his lips, but he could not make them meet.

"Harbouring an unmarried couple in your house! Flying in my face, and in the face of God, and of His Holy Church! Do you think that's nothing to confess?"

The priest's increasing anger seemed to make Driscoll calm.

"I've no fear of God on the head of that. I feel in my heart there's no sin on them, nor on me either. Give me absolution, Father, and let me be going my way."

The priest took off his stole. With set teeth he began to wind it round the ritual he had let fall in his lap.

"You're a public sinner equally with them," he said, his voice shaking with passion. "You'll get no sacrament, no absolution, no communion, no anointing from me, a priest of God, till you repent of your sin, and make reparation to me and God by turning out these people from under your roof."

Driscoll stared at him with a half-dazed expression, as if he did not fully understand.

"Reparation—turn out—a woman and a child—in the snow that's in it," he murmured disjointedly.

"Snow or no snow, you must abide by the law of God or suffer for it—here and hereafter," Father Mahon said ruthlessly.

He stood by the side of the bed looking down menacingly at Driscoll, whose eyes had closed again.

"Well?" he said brusquely.

A smile grew slowly on the old man's face. His eyes opened, and he looked at the priest fearlessly.

"I'll leave myself to God. The kind heart of Him might overlook my coming before Him without the holy oil on me," he said simply.

The priest put his stole in the pocket of his soutane, walked half-way to the door, stood, biting his nails as if perplexed, and came back to the bedside.

"I want to give you every chance—the Church is a kind mother. Will you turn them out?" he said in a softer tone.

"God won't ask me to do what I haven't the heart to do myself—His own Mother, they say, was once turned out in the snow, and He within her. No, He won't ask me," Driscoll said wearily.

Father Mahon muttered, "Your sins be on your own head then," and left the room.

He snatched his overcoat off the kitchen table, and stalked out of the house, without a glance at Alice and Bessy Reilly who were standing by the fireplace.

Driscoll was praying in an intense voice when Alice entered the bedroom. She could make out the Irish words of Our Father. She smoothed his pillow. He prayed on, unheeding. She sat by the head of the bed and unconsciously repeated the words as they fell from his lips. Soon the beads slipped from his fingers, and he seemed to sleep. After a while he opened his eyes and spoke rapidly.

"Now I'm ready—going before God with all the rites of the Church—it's grand to feel my God within me. And the young priest, Father Malone, that gave me the Holy Communion, had the look of a saint on him."

He looked at Alice with glassy eyes that opened wide questioningly. Then, with a smile of recognition, he said—

"The rooms are all ready. There's nothing now in our way," and he talked on to the girl he had been about to marry years ago.

Half frightened, Alice called in Bessy Reilly, who felt his pulse and watched the workings of his livid face.

"Maurice, send me out a class," he said in a feeble voice. "It's a lesson in grafting this morning."

"The end is in his eyes," Bessy said, "and the wit is gone out of his words. It's lucky we had the priest in time."

"Could you send for my husband?" Alice said. "He's probably at Liscannow."

Bessy came back in about ten minutes, and said that Jim Reardon had gone off on a horse of Clancy's, and wouldn't be a minute. She knelt by the bedside and read the prayers for the dying. Now and again Driscoll gave the responses, but mostly he talked of Ireland and the great country she was going to be. . . .

Two hours later, when Maurice came in hurriedly, he found Driscoll propped up with pillows, breathing with a stertorous rattle, his fingers twitching the sheet.

"I'm afraid he won't know you," Alice said tearfully.

Driscoll turned his head slightly on the pillow and smiled.

"God kept the life in me till you came," he whispered. His voice had a new strength, and the unseeing stare had gone from his eyes. "How many votes did you get?"

"About one in three, we expect; but don't think of that now," Maurice said brokenly, kneeling by the bed.

"I'm glad my vote was one of them. You'll bear no malice, Maurice agra? The heart of the people is all right, only some of them are led astray. Men make differences, but some day God'll scatter them like the sun sucks up the mist on

a May morning. Only you won't run away, Maurice? It's in Ireland where you're most wanted that you must work—better still," he said pleadingly, "in Bourneen." His voice faltered. "And now if you'd say the Litany of the Blessed Virgin for me? I'd like to hear it."

A troubled look passed over his face while Maurice was seeking the page of the Litany in the Prayer-book.

"There's something else on my mind, and then I'm ready. Oh!—Duffy, the lawyer'll tell you all about it. That's how you can stay here if you like. I don't put it on you to stay. And I can't ease the hardest things you'll have to bear. But I've left you the cottage and the garden and the little I have put by. No one can take the bread out of your mouths till——" he paused and smiled hopefully, "till, please God, nobody'll want to try; and now, begin—'We fly to thy patronage, O holy mother of God.'"

He gave the responses firmly for a few seconds. Then his head fell back. Maurice read on. Bessy Reilly came to the bed with an anxious face. She put her hand over Driscoll's heart, took the watch, which was hanging on the bed-post, and held the glass to his lips. She scanned the glass closely in the light.

"He's gone home," she said quietly.

Alice sobbed aloud. Maurice looked at the bed in silence for a few moments, then he read the prayer to the end.

"Maurice," Alice called through the open back door.

He wiped the earth off his spade and stuck it in the ground.

"Breakfast?" he said, smiling as he approached.

"And the post."

"A letter from Breslin," he said, opening it.

"Well?"

"He wants us back, says I'm even a worse fool than he always thought me. And he has bought a Chippendale bookcase—his Chinese period. Louis doesn't much like it—not pure enough in design, he says."

"Poor Louis!" she said compassionately. She laid her hand on Maurice's shoulder. "Though Uncle John, too, says we're beating chaff," she added thoughtfully, "and your father hasn't been near us since the funeral. People shun me in the street—and the way they look at me. . . ." Her voice broke off in a whisper.

"I've brought all this on you—it is too much for you, we——"

"I'm a coward—but I'm strong too," she interrupted. She trembled and leant against him for support. Her lips twitched. She bent her head so that he could not see her face, and bit her lips in an effort to control them. She straightened herself and faced him with shining eyes.

"We'll wait," she said firmly. "You believe it's worth while?"

"It's more than the dawn already," he said with enthusiasm. "Priests even have come round. Father Malone says the mission was all wrong. Father Cassidy and Father Delahunty are friendly. Others——"

"Then we'll wait for the sun to rise," she said, watching the dark clouds on the horizon. "Truth and freedom must come of faith and love—we'll stay here working, enduring, waiting."

Maureen stood between them, facing the open door. She listened with a puzzled puckering of her forehead. Her face brightened when Alice stopped speaking.

"What is Maureen do-ning, mammy?" she asked.

"I don't know, dear."

"Waiting—just waiting. Mammy waiting. Daddy waiting. Maureen waiting."

The clouds parted and a gleam of sun lit her hair.

THE END

"Waiter, what's the price of the
 door, the kind with a painted
 but the kind that is painted when the
 stopped speaking."

"What is the price of the door, the kind that is painted when the
 stopped speaking?"

"I don't know, but I know the price of the door, the kind that is painted when the
 stopped speaking."

"I don't know, but I know the price of the door, the kind that is painted when the
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"I don't know, but I know the price of the door, the kind that is painted when the
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